VOLUME 2 NUMBER 7 35p

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

The truth about Australian SF
Fiction from: Lee Harding
Cherry Wilder Stanley G Weinbaum

SF art from: Chris Foss Michael Payne
Philip Lee Gary Chalk
and Kristine Nason





SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY



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TIMES MIRROR

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY . . . goes dingo! This is the SFM AussieCon Special which, for those unfamiliar with the term, celebrates the World sf Convention being held in Australia this year. It should be quite an event, especially as it's the first time that the Australian fans have acted as hosts. They are obviously attempting to make their presence felt, so it seems quite suitable to devote an issue of SFM to an investigation of Australian sf.

As an introduction to their fiction we've included two original short stories by Australian authors. Lee Harding has contributed 'Night of Passage' which serves as an interesting example of the sort of sf being written by the more established authors over there. His short stories appeared quite regularly in England between 1960 and 1970 in the sf magazines, 'Science Fantasy,' 'New Worlds' and 'Vision of Tomorrow'. The second piece comes from Cherry Wilder who is one of the newer writers on the scene. Her story was custom-built for SFM and she has pandered to her English audience by incorporating all the clichés of the Australian outback that we expect to see.



The fiction gives us an idea of what's happening now, but to find out what went before we'll need some reference to 'John Brosnan's Guide to the Australian Science Fiction Scene'. He discusses all the prominent sf authors, including Lee Harding — which links up quite well with his story. All this information about Australian sf might inspire you to read more, in which case the reviews of a couple of anthologies, and details of where to get them, should come in handy.

So much for the contents of this issue. Now for a little something about AussieCon for those of us who can't get there.

The Convention takes place at the Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne, from 14 to 17 August. The Guest of Honour will be Ursula LeGuin, who will also be running a workshop for new writers for a few days before the Con begins. The Australian GoH will be Donald H Tuck who is best known for his 'Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy' (Vol 1 of which was reviewed in 'SFM' Vol 2 No 1). Other sf notables expected to attend include Ben Bova, Kelly Freas, Larry Niven, Robert Silverberg, Jack Williamson, Roger Zelazny and Leigh Brackett.

The events organised for Aussie Con follow the traditional pattern for most sf Conventions. There will be a film season, which has been arranged in collaboration with the National Film Theatre of Australia, and an Art Show with a special category for illustrations of episodes from the works of Ursula LeGuin. The paintings will be assessed by a panel of judges and New English Library will be awarding a special cash prize. There will be the usual fancy-dress parade, auctions of old sf pulps, and other functions, and a banquet. The whole Convention will be given exclusive coverage by one of the Melbourne TV stations and a new sf play for radio will be given its premier. But of major importance to the sf world will be the election of the annual Hugo Award winners.

Incidentally this month's cover comes from Australia, too. It was painted by Michael Payne and is the cover from a new sf anthology edited by Lee Harding called 'Beyond Tomorrow: An Anthology of Modern Science Fiction'.

Next Month: Read 'Shatterday' an original story from Harlan Ellison never before published in England.

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NIGHT OF PASSAGE



SIAN CARDY

By Lee Harding

'I carried an image of one of the old maps deep in my mind. I was convinced that what Dominus told me was true – that the streets ran as straight and true as furrows in a field, and that if I followed the wide road he had indicated then I would make the best possible time. With luck I would reach the heart of the city before midnight. And then . . .'



When we came in sight of the city, I left the rest of the party behind and continued on alone. The Elders settled down to await my return. They drank wine and smoked the ceremonial Pipe of Passage and chanted the old songs. This also was part of the ritual, and they would keep it up without pause until I returned.

I made good time across the open ground. I crouched low and leaned forward so that my body merged with the sunburned grass. I moved with confidence, for this landscape was my natural habitat. Later on it would not be so easy.

The afternoon was well advanced and I planned to reach the outskirts of the city by dusk. I had no desire to enter this unfamiliar territory until the daylight had waned, so I would bide my time and move in at twilight, when the approaching darkness would afford me good cover.

When I thought of the dangers that lay ahead my soul shivered in dread, but I knew that if I survived this long night of initiation then tomorrow I would be a man.

The edge of the forest was some distance behind me. Only a narrow stretch of open ground remained to be crossed. I began to ease my pace. I selected a suitable tree and climbed it, settling down in a comfortable fork half-way up to await the dusk.

Out on the landscape, nothing moved. A swollen orange sun was sinking out of sight behind the jagged silhouette of the city. The enormous buildings stood out against the sunset, their topmost towers limned with an ominous glare so that they looked like the ramparts of some forbidding mountain range.

Away in the distance I thought I could hear the soft chanting of the Elders, carried to me on the shoulders of the night wind. I felt suddenly lost and lonely and very far from home.

The world gradually darkened. When the first wan star appeared in the heavens I fixed my eye upon it, folded my hands before me and whispered a solemn Prayer of Passage. Then I climbed down and resumed my journey.

The open ground was hazardous underfoot. It was littered with relics of the Old Ones and avoiding them had become an acquired skill.

I angled cautiously towards the open road. I had made a careful study of the old maps with Dominus and I knew it would take me to the heart of the city. But I would not risk my life by using it and revealing my presence to whatever predators roamed this forsaken place. Instead I would follow it at a discreet distance, with my body crouched so low that my fingertips brushed the ground.

My senses grew more alert as I approached the city. My ears strained to catch the slightest sound, anything that would betray the presence of some wild animal skulking through this no-man's-land between the city and the open country. My eyes probed deep into the twilight, searching. My mind tingled with apprehension as it struggled to sort through the familiar sensations of dusk.

Sometimes the ugly shape of a deserted vehicle would loom up ahead and I would give it a wide berth. It was well known that predators often used them for sleeping quarters when the night closed down, and I had no wish to arouse their curiosity. I had many long miles to travel before I became a man.

My left hand never strayed far from the heavy knife sheathed at my waist, and the deep pouch of throwing-stones was a comforting weight jogging against my right thigh. I had made longer journeys than this, but none so dangerous. But this I had never considered. Passage was an important event in the life of any youth, the challenging bridge between his childhood and whatever the future held for him in trust. It was a long established ritual of my people.

Tonight there would be a full moon and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. These were good omens. The city would be a labyrinth of shadows and the light of heaven would be my only guide. Yet I reminded myself that the moonlight that would blaze my path to the heart of the city could just as readily expose me to predators, if I was not careful.

Once I had reached the outskirts there would remain a good ten miles of travel before I reached my destination. The wide road would lead me there, and I would hug the shadows wherever I could and so conceal my presence. I would keep to the side streets if necessary, although I knew this would lengthen the duration of my journey to a dangerous degree.

I carried an image of one of the old maps deep in my mind. I was convinced that what Dominus told me was true – that the streets ran as straight and true as furrows in a field, and that if I followed the wide road he had indicated then I would make the best possible time. With luck I would reach the heart of the city before midnight. And then . . .

'Remember, Malo, you must find a building Ten Storeys High. Nothing less will do. Only then will you know you have reached the Centre . . .'

This also was part of the ritual. And once I had found such a building I would take refuge inside it for the remainder of the night. Shortly before dawn, I would collect my trophy and depart in haste before the daylight betrayed me.

I drew level with the first buildings. They seemed to be dwellings of some kind; squat, ugly little boxes crumbling into ruin. Their sharp contours jarred in my mind like a musical discord. They were so different from the homes of my people, who had designed their dwellings to blend with the earth. It was hard to imagine that, centuries ago, anything human had ever lived in them.

But as much as these crude buildings repulsed me, I pressed close against them as I moved into the city. I had need of their protective shadows. Their touch made me shiver as I continued on my way.

Every nerve in my body was tensed for the first sign of danger. Even now, many years after The Fall, the city was never quite deserted. Other initiates had returned to the valley with many strange stories of what they had found there. Of course, one could never be sure just how much of their tales was fact and how much mere fancy, intensified in some cases by anxiety and loneliness.

Passage was a trying time for the young men and women who participated, and you could not deny the damning evidence that the city had failed to return a number of fine youths from their Night of Passage

Much of what we knew about the city was hearsay and legend, from which a few useful facts could be extracted. It seemed likely that wild animals would have infiltrated the deserted streets, and that they might be even more dangerous than their kin who roamed the open country. But this had never been proved. Except for times of Passage, people avoided the city. Some maintained that not even wild animals approached it; that they distrusted it as much as any man. I was not prepared to take any chances. I was determined to survive this dark night alive – and emerge as a man.

I hurried down the wide footpath, dodging many strange obstructions in the shadows. At first the silence seemed unnatural, but as my ears adjusted to their new surroundings I discovered it was not as absolute as I had first imagined.

Far off, near the centre of the city, I could just make out the doleful cry of some strange animal. I could feel its tingling presence near the edge of my mind and far, far away. I thought it might be a wild dog, but it was too far away for me to be sure. It sounded like some lonely beast baying at the newly risen moon. I gritted my teeth and hurried on.

The city stank. I had expected it would, but I was not prepared for the way the odour clung to the night air like a shroud. Too many people had perished here. The air was weighed down with the burden of their passing. Perhaps in another hundred years the tireless winds and rain would wash away this rank memory of humanity, but for the moment it was trapped in these steel and concrete canyons, and I moved nervously through it like a moth through woodsmoke.

The moon rose higher and slowly transformed the wide road into a bright ribbon slicing ahead through the darkness. This made it easier for me to pick my way, but it also lightened the protective shadows.

Everything around me was covered with a deep layer of dust. It soon covered my body and made breathing unpleasant. My feet stirred it up as I hurried along. Several times I almost sneezed, but I managed to hold it back. Such an explosion of sound would echo like a cannon shot through the deserted streets, and I had no wish to advertise my presence.

As I advanced deeper into the city the baying sound grew closer. The feeling of something cruel and dangerous became more pronounced in my head. It seemed that now there was not one but many animal voices joined together in a discordant howl, tossing their loneliness back and forth to each other across the darkened city. I had the frightening sensation of a hungry pack closing in around the borders of my brain. The doleful dirge made me shudder and press deeper into the shadows.

For the first time since I had begun my Passage, I felt afraid. I unsheathed my knife and fingered the smooth round stones in my pouch. Bad luck for me if I ran into a pack of wild dogs. . . .

By now the buildings had begun to alter in appearance. They no longer looked like dwellings but reminded me of the huge storage silos in our valley. But whereas they were tall,

round columns, these buildings retained the unpleasant contours of the buildings on the outskirts. They were also taller, although I could see that I still had some distance to travel before I found one Ten Storeys High.

I never thought of cheating. I knew I could choose to hide-out in a building less than halfway to the city, and so save myself some time, but my guilt would be so great that I knew it would betray me to the Elders. Disgrace would be sudden and irrevocable. So I could not and would not evade my responsibilities. The only way out was forward.

I pressed on. The moon drew a soft silver shawl across the city. The road sloped upwards, supported by stout pillars. In the distance I could see crossroads merging into a shimmering pattern that reminded me of a cloverleaf, a scintillating symphony of silence.

Once again Dominus had been proved right. This was my first glimpse of the complex transport system which had once stitched this bustling city together. The sight was breath-taking – and somehow tragic. That men had once created such marvellous designs . . .

I thought about the moon. Men had lived there once, long ago, in their domed cities. This also had been told to me by Dominus. But that had been before The Fall had left them stranded, like divers suddenly deprived of air

Each running step disturbed more of the pervading dust. It rose high in the air, irritating my eyes and nose. I wondered idly how much of it might be the residue of a million lost lives, destined to be forever moved around by the gale force winds that scoured the steep-sided canyons of the city.

I looked quickly behind me, as though I expected some grey old ghost to tap me on the shoulder. But there was no such phantom. Only the far-off dirge of lonely animals to set my nerves on edge.

The road climbed higher, reaching for the moon. I slipped away from this tempting course and instead hurried from shadow to deeper shadow between the supporting pillars. Above the road cut a wide swathe of darkness across the stars.

When the road swept down to the ground again, I moved out from underneath and hugged the sparse shadows along the footpath. I was beginning to tire from my long trek, but I sensed that the end was in sight.

I had passed under the first great cloverleaf of interconnecting roads that marked the entry point to the inner part of the city. Around me the buildings towered into the night sky and the howling of wild dogs was getting much too close for comfort. I could feel their hunger crowding around the fringes of my mind.

The road and footpath became steadily more congested with derelict vehicles. The diversity of their shape and size amazed me; I had never seen so many of them strewn so close together. Legend was that The Fall had happened so quickly most people had been taken by surprise and were unable to save themselves. Everything had collapsed in the space of a few short hours. Only a few survived, of which my people were the descendants. It was a sobering myth.

My heart began to race when I realised I had reached my objective – the heart of the city. I had made remarkably good time. Now all that remained was for me to select a suitable building Ten Storeys High and hole-up for the night.

The dreadful baying sounds seemed to be coming from all around me now; and they were getting closer all the time. This was no time to dally; if they caught my scent I was in for a rough time.

I scanned the building opposite. I counted up the rows of gaping windows until they disappeared into the darkness. I breathed a sigh of relief. This one would do. It was much Higher than Ten Storeys.

I ran across the cluttered street, conscious of myself as a small blur of darkness weaving a sefe path between the derelict vehicles and the pervading dust.

Enormous windows confronted me on the other side. Glass littered the footpath and was buried in the dust. I stepped warily. Several huge vehicles were sprawled across the footpath with their grotesque snouts thrust through the broken windows.

I saw many bodies scattered around just inside the windows. For a moment I was astonished to discover people so well preserved, but when I stepped closer I saw that I was mistaken.

These people were not human beings, they were models. The moonlight had tricked me into thinking they were otherwise. Some stood with their arms outstretched, making a parody of mankind, their blank eyes looking out from their polished faces without a touch of expression. Traces of a fibre that might once have been clothing still clung to their smooth limbs. They reminded me of the dolls our young children made at festive times to commemorate the passing of the Old Ones. The effect was chilling.

I picked my way carefully through the broken glass and entered the building. The darkness inside was almost palpable. I waited for my eyes to adjust, listening to the baying sounds drawing closer.

Dominus' briefing helped me to understand that this great building was a *store* – a place where the Old Ones gathered to buy food and clothing and the thousands of little toys that filled out their useless lives.

The room I was in was enormous. It was as wide and as broad as the street outside. The walls were lined with shelving packed with cans and bottles and other curiosities. The floor area between them was a jumble of overturned counters and scattered goods.

I moved deeper into the store. The nearest shelves carried brightly coloured cans covered with dust; each bore a faded label advertising a familiar fruit or vegetable. For a moment I was enchanted with my discovery. I knew that the Old Ones had practised many strange rituals, including the internment of food in these clever little cans. What an abundance of trophies I had chanced upon!

I remembered Tony and the shiny silver machine he had brought back from the city at his Time of Passage. It was covered with knobs and buttons, and there was a narrow strip of metal, like a needle, that moved back and forth behind a complicated series of numbers when you turned one of the knobs. Dominus had said that it had once drawn power from the batteries inside its case, but these had long since perished. The Elders had studied the instrument suspiciously for some time before they chanted the ceremonial Song of Interment and buried it deep in the ground.

I felt elated. There was so much for me to choose from. And I was determined to select a trophy that would dazzle and confound The Elders and ensure their respect. My Night of Passage would be celebrated in song . . .

If I ever got back. The wild dogs had forced their hostile presence deep into my mind. I could sense them crowding together, bunching up. I could almost feel the sharp edges of their teeth.

The trophy could wait until morning. In the meantime, where should I hide, and how best to defend myself if the pack attacked?

I thought of climbing another few storeys, but dismissed the idea at once. It would be better to dig-in at ground level, where flight could more easily be accomplished. I did not fancy being trapped upstairs with a pack of wild dogs snapping at my heels.

It would be a long and restless night. I hunkered down in a far corner of the enormous room and settled to wait out the darkness. I had a full view of the store and the cluttered street outside. During the next few minutes the unearthly baying rose in pitch and seemed to grow more urgent. It set my teeth on edge. Then it seemed to move away.

I breathed easier. I didn't want to tangle with anything like *that*. With my knife I might take one or two of them, but not a whole pack.

I allowed myself to unwind a little. I had just settled down, with my back to the wall, and was happily thanking the Lord for my good fortune, when the silence was shattered by the most mournful, terrifying sound I have ever heard, or ever wish to hear. It seemed to come from a long way off in the west. It struck deep into my soul. I crouched down in the corner and fingered my knife nervously. The dawn seemed far away.

The dreadful sound was not repeated. After a while I let my muscles relax and drew the twitching fragments of my nerves together.

I sat alone in a great ocean of silence. I could hear my breathing like a roar in the darkness. All other sounds had ceased. A deep weariness crept over me and I drifted off to sleep, secure in the knowledge that my senses would rouse me at the first sign of danger. Dominus had tried to explain to me how this special gift of mine came about, and how my mind was subtly different from the other children, but I never could grasp it.

While I slept I dreamed of my home and the valley and the colourful dwellings of my people. I dreamed of the great golden sun and how it charmed the seeds from the earth and touched every corner of our lives. And I was content.

I woke when the first faint flush of dawn crept in through the shattered windows, and discovered I was not alone.

Some presence I could not yet define had crept into the darkened store. I could feel it all around me a danger closer than anything I had encountered since I had entered the city. It was a cruel, animal thing and it pressed in upon my mind like some dreadful shadow.

I was instantly alert and crouched in a defensive position, my knife in my left hand and the fingers of my right buried deep in my pouch of stones. With the blade my hands are equally adept, but my right arm is best for throwing.

I peered anxiously into the deep shadows. I strained my ears and soon made out strange shuffling noises coming from the other side of the room. I shifted my balance and turned to my right. And out in the shadows something *moved*.

All I could see was a vague, furtive shape no bigger than a man – but it moved with a nervous grace unlike any man I had ever seen.

God protect me, I breathed. My body was shaking. What if this creature realised I was in the store? What chance would I stand if it attacked me? That I had come so far and risked so much, only to be confronted with such a threat . . .

I raised my left hand in readiness. The blade was rigid in my hand now. A cold sweat covered me from head to foot. I was convinced I was about to undergo a supreme test of manhood, after which everything I had ever done would pale into insignificance. If I survived this ordeal I would indeed become a man. If I did not, then my people would mourn my passing, as they had mourned others before me.

I watched the shadow grope its way around the room. For the moment it seemed unaware of my presence. My mind received no murderous impressions; so far so good. But what next?

I wondered what it could be looking for. Food? But what manner of animal grubbed around in these old buildings? My fear abated somewhat and I grew curious. I had confidence in my long blade and my skill with the throwing stones was unrivalled. I need only hold steady and . . .

I began to inch forward, trying to get a better view of the intruder. The floor was a jungle of scattered goods and boxes and cans piled high into drunken tiers. To my right I could see two ragged pyramids of canned food. The dark blur I was following was poised between them. In my mind I could sense that its back was to me. Now was as good a time as any to effect my escape, before it knew what had happened. Once outside I was confident I could outdistance anything other than a wild dog. This creature was no dog, so I was determined to take my chance. My senses told me there was only one of them, and my knife would stand me in good stead if I was caught.

I calculated the distance between myself and the shuffling figure, and the distance between where I crouched and the street outside. There was no sense in delaying my move any longer; already the dawn was well advanced. Soon it would be impossible to hide in the store without being seen. It was now or never . . .

I was still getting poised for flight when I sneezed. The dust had become overpowering. Afterwards, I would never be sure just what had provoked this sudden paroxysm. Had it really been involuntary and beyond my control, or had I unconsciously released the explosion so as to announce my presence to the stranger in the shadows?

At that moment there was no time to consider my motives. The creature swung around with diabolical suddenness as though it had been physically struck. I saw its huge arms swing wide and topple the tall pyramids on either side and it let loose a terrifying scream of wrath that brought me frantically to my feet.

My skin went numb when I recognised the same dreadful howl that had shaken me before I fell asleep. *This* was the creature I had wanted so much to avoid. And it was no wild dog – but something *else*.

A man. But not like any man I had ever seen. He had wild, white hair that stood out straight from his head as though it were wire, and a long, dirty beard that hung down past his waist. There was a crazed look in his eyes and more danger in every inch of his filthy body than I had ever faced in my life. He wore a tattered garment knotted around his waist and his skin was the colour and texture of the belly of a fish.

Less than thirty feet separated us. The creature saw me at the same time. His fierce hatred boiling into my mind like molten lava. Without a moment's hesitation he launched himself towards me. He spread his great hands wide and clawed at the air and his eyes were filled with an animal fury. His mouth gaped open and he screamed an incomprehensible curse as he sprang.

For a moment I panicked. I had never used a knife on another man. But there rose in my mind a memory that gave me courage: I remembered how my father had stood calm and as solid as an old oak and felled a murderous wild bull with one powerful throw of the stone.

With the clarity of this vision my training took over. I faced the creature's charge as coolly as my father had faced that wild bull. I calculated shrewdly and drew back my throwing arm, my left hand holding my knife ready in case my stone failed to stop him.

I waited until he had covered half the distance that separated us. I could even feel myself smiling as I threw my right hand forward and sent the beautiful smooth stone flying towards my attacker.

It caught him on the forehead. He uttered an exclamation of shock and pain and stumbled to e halt. A dazed expression came over him. He made weak and ineffectual groping movements towards me with his hands. His eyes were wide and staring.

He fell slowly. His fall toppled another small pyramid of cans and the floor shook. A flurry of dust rose around his prostrate body.

It became very quiet in the store. The only sound in all the universe seemed to be the deep rasp of my own breath.

Was he dead?

I edged cautiously forward until I stood over the fallen creature. I could see by the rise and fall of his chest that he was alive, but unconscious. For how long I dared not wait to find out.

It was getting light outside. The ancient city was stirring for another empty day and it was time to be on my way. My long night of initiation was over.

But what about my trophy? I looked quickly around the enormous room, remembering my desire to return to The Elders with something remarkable. A trophy that would add lustre to my Passage . . .

While I dallied the frightful creature groaned and stirred. My heart leaped into my mouth for fear that he would recover. But I was lucky; he remained unconscious.

Just then a thought occurred to me. It was so bold and audacious that I could not help but smile. *Well, why not?* If The Elders did not find it amusing then it would certainly impress them. But I would have to work quickly . . .

I raised my knife and set to work.

Later, I fled from the city as if all my unimagined devils were snapping at my feet.

I made the return journey without incident, conscious in a way I had never been before of the vast distances that separated the grotesque wild men of the city. Sometimes I thought I heard their wild dirge start up again and my feet moved even faster than before.

Poor mad creatures, I thought. Doomed to eke out their miserable lives because their fear of open country kept them trapped within these steel and concrete canyons. Now that I had faced out one of them, I feared them even more than the wild dogs and cats and other animals that were known to inhabit the city, but which I had not yet seen.

Fast I ran, hugging the early morning shadows and praying that no one and no thing would see me. My trophy swung lightly from my belt and did not impede my progress. Many times I detoured down winding side streets when the wide road looked too open. On more than one occasion I heard, or thought I heard, the dreadful baying sounds of pursuit. But no predators caught up with me. I had outdistanced them all.

I ran until I was exhausted, until the outskirts of the city were far behind and the open country stretched away from me on all sides. Only then did I ease my desperate pace.

The Elders were waiting where I had left them, by the edge of the forest. Their fire had burned low and all the wine had been drunk. They marked my approach with relief and interest.

I managed to walk towards them with my head high and affecting a jaunty step. I was even smiling as I stepped forward to receive my Blessing.

They acknowledged my safe return with customary ceremony. I waited politely while the ritual greetings were exchanged. They examined my body for wounds or abrasions and were pleased to find none. Then they ran their fingers through the crust of dried salt and dust that covered me from head to foot, and received my approval. I could almost hear their minds whispering, *Now, there's a brave one*.

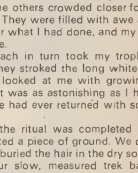
When the moment was right I stepped close to them and, still smiling, offered them my trophy.

The Eldest hesitated for a moment, then he accepted it and held it carefully in his wrinkled hands. The others crowded closer for a look at my prize. They were filled with awe and appreciation for what I had done, and my heart sang with pride.

They each in turn took my trophy in their hands. They stroked the long white strands of hair and looked at me with growing respect. The result was as astonishing as I had hoped. no initiate had ever returned with so strange a trophy.

When the ritual was completed The Eldest consecrated a piece of ground. We dug a deep hole and buried the hair in the dry soil. Then we began our slow, measured trek back to the valley.

And from the expressions on their faces I knew I was a man.




PHILIP LEE
Philip Lee

PART 7

THE SIZE OF THINGS TO COME

EVENTS BEYOND THEIR COMPREHENSION APPEAR TO HAVE DRAWN NICK NOVA AND DIXIE TO A FINAL RECKONING IN THE FORM OF A GROTESQUE LITTLE GREMLIN WHO CALLS HIMSELF MYCROUS ! AS YET THE PURPOSE OF THIS DEFORMED LITTLE CREATURE HAS NOT YET BEEN REVEALED

WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY MALCOLM POYNTER

BROUGHT US HERE !!

WELCOME ! I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU. NO DOUBT YOU'RE WONDERING WHO I AM AND WHY I BROUGHT YOU HERE !

OH YES YOU HE OF WHAT HAPPENI HAS BE ACC

BUT W

I DON'T BELIEVE IT !

HA HA HAAA . . . WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE WHERE YOU REALLY ARE ? YOU WOULDN'T LIKE IT ! PERHAPS A GLIMPSE TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND !

DARK THOUGHTS ?

HA . . HA . . HA ! YES DARK ! SURELY YOU DON'T THINK ME CAPABLE OF DIVINE THOUGHTS ?? ! TAKE A LOOK AND TELL ME IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN HERE BEFORE ?

. . OR HERE ?

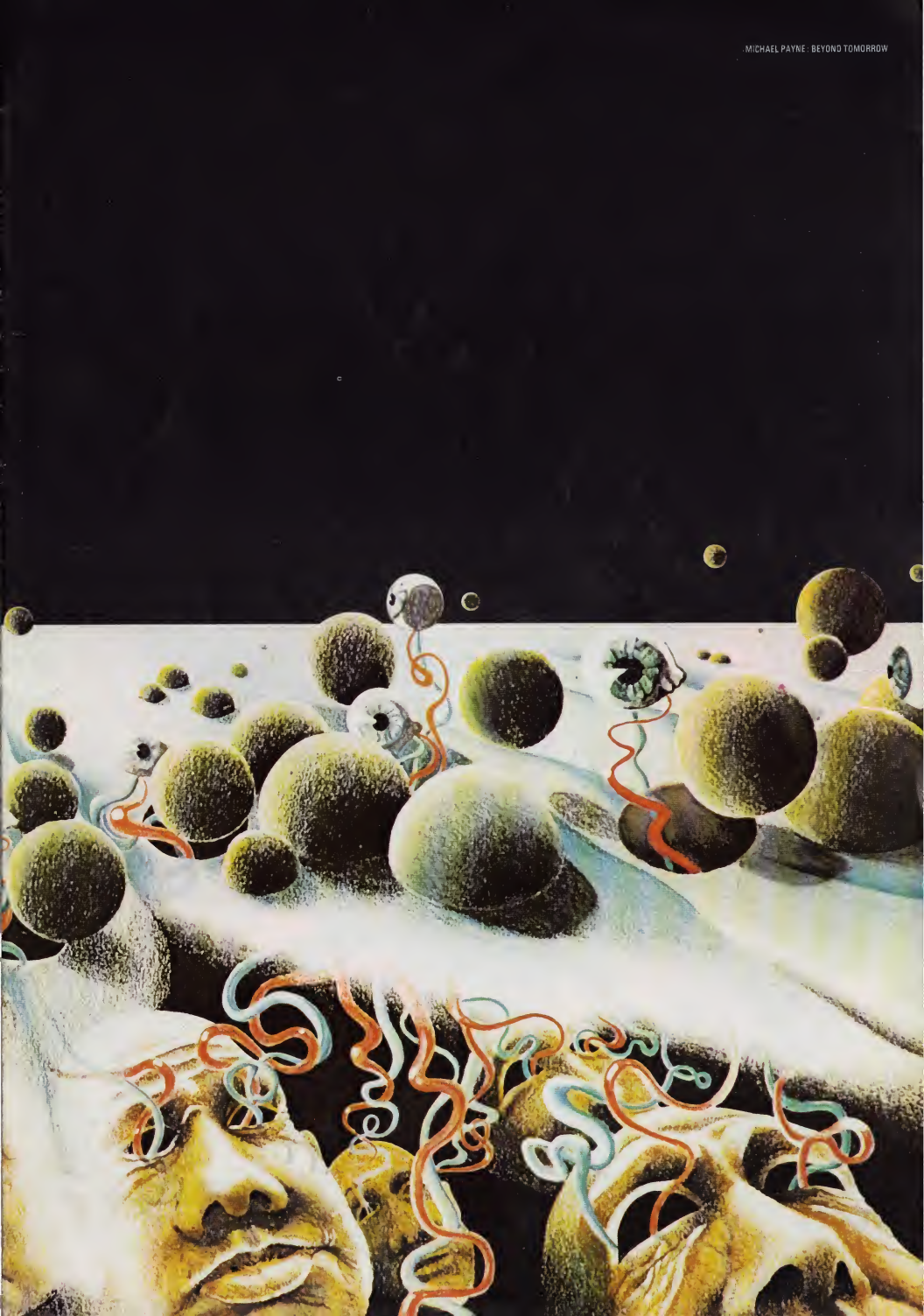
NO ! I BELIEVE YOU !! WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH US ?

LATER I THINK . . YOU LOOK TIRED. FIRST SOME FOOD AND DRINK, THEN SLEEP AND SOME NEW ATTIRE AND THEN YOU WILL BE READY . .

. . FOR WHAT ?

POOF !

NICK, HE'S A MANIAC . . HOMICIDAL ! WHAT ARE



SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY

KRISTINE NASON (READERS PAINTING COMPETITION)



NEWS

1974 Nebula Awards

Best Novel

1 *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin
2 *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* by Philip K Dick
3 *334* by Thomas M Disch
4 *The Godwhale* by TJ Bass

Best Novella

1 *Born with the Dead* by Robert Silverberg
2 *A Song for Lya* by George RR Martin
3 *On the Street of the Serpents* by Michael Bishop

Best Novelette

1 *If the Stars are Gods* by Gregory Benford and Gordon Eklund
2 *The Rest is Silence* by CL Grant
3 *Twilla* by Tom Reamy

Best Short Story

1 *The Day Before the Revolution* by Ursula Le Guin
2 *The Engine at Heartspring's Centre* by Roger Zelazny
3 *After King Kong Fell* by Philip José Farmer

Best Dramatic Presentation

1 *Sleeper*
2 *Fantastic Planet*
3 *Frankenstein: The True Story*

Grand Master Award

Robert A Heinlein

Winners of the Nebula Award are chosen by the members of Science Fiction Writers of America and the Nebula trophies are presented at the annual nebula banquet.

UFO Research

Brian Robinson reports on the British UFO Research Association's National Research and Investigations Conference which was held on 10 and 11 May 1975 in Stoke-on-Trent.

Ufology, as followers of the Unidentified Flying Object call their occupation, is laced with a rich variety of cranks, nut-cases and pure eccentrics. Not unnaturally the press and public have latched on to this entertaining side of the subject and the UFO, in this country at least, is a stock topic for ridicule. However, the British UFO Research Association, which describes itself as a 'serious' research organisation, wants to change this image. As a first step it held its first ever scientific conference at the beginning of May in Stoke-on-Trent, attracting a sizeable crowd inclusive of the public, press and television cameras.

What BUFORA means by serious and scientific is a matter of interpretation, by the conference started well with a lecture by Professor John Taylor of Uri Geller fame. Most of the lecture was taken up by a defence of Taylor's work on the Geller effect. Illustrating his talk with samples of the now-familiar bent spoons and 'scrunched' paper-clips, Taylor argued in favour of his electric force theory to explain Geller-type powers.

The only piece of new evidence came at the end of the lecture, when Taylor revealed that sounds heard by people he used in experiments were also heard by people who sighted UFOs. Because of this, he said, he would try and explain Geller and UFOs by the same theory, and he rejected the idea that UFOs were alien spacecraft.

Nevertheless, although the ufologists themselves don't necessarily subscribe to the alien theory, at least half the conference was given up to trying to establish proof of alien spaceships.

The principal characteristic of an UFO is its tremendous acceleration and totally silent movement. So, the first question asked was, what kind of noiseless power could produce these speeds? This is one of the biggest stumbling blocks in a true scientific explanation of spaceships, and the conference hoped for some original arguments. However, conclusions came down on the side of the familiar gravity-powered craft, old hat to scientists and in science fiction, where the gravity drive has been a common form of propulsion for half a century.

Likewise, lack ot new thought attended a lecture given by a member of the Extra-Terrestrial Society. He concluded that the most likely form of drive for an interstellar ship would be nuclear, something which would emit a sizeable amount of radiation. Unfortunately, although members of the Society have spent five years in the search, they haven't yet been able to find traces of this radiation.

The most interesting statement of the meeting came from a Mr CAE O'Brien, a noted lecturer on UFOs. Attacking the problem mathematically he said that if you managed to see a UFO at all (a 160-million-to-one chance), and if it was alien, the chances were that it came from Venus! There were a few surprised expressions at that conclusion.

However, the most convincing demonstration of the existence of UFOs came during the showing of a one-minute-long film. It was shot by an ATV camera crew while they were filming on a hillside at Banbury, near Oxford, in October 1971. During the filming of a TV programme the crew noticed an object hovering in the sky. The cameraman filmed the object as it bobbed and weaved in the lens view, before it changed colour from orange to white and accelerated away, leaving a vapour trail behind it.

The Ministry of Defence claimed it to be an aeroplane from a nearby airfield dumping fuel. The airfield itself denied this and the cameraman, experienced in filming aircraft, said it was nothing he had seen before. BUFORA, sufficiently convinced, have produced a detailed report on the UFO which they are sending to over thirty research establishments around the world for evaluation.

Although the official American UFO operation has now ended, serious research still takes place into the 50,000 sightings recorded to date. Recently, the French government also set up an UFO research centre. In Britain, however, ufology is still a subject only for amateurs. BUFORA hopes that, through similar conferences, it will add a greater number of serious scientists to its 600 membership. And then the study of UFOs will be put on the same level as the studies being undertaken in America and France.

Hugo Nominations 1974

One of the main events at a World Con is the presentation of the annual Hugo Awards. All the nominating ballots have now been received by the AussieCon committee and the list of nominated books is as follows:

Best Novel (81 nominated)

The Dispossessed by Ursula Le Guin; *Fire Time* by Poul Anderson; *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* by Philip K Dick; *Inverted World* by Christopher Priest; *The Mote in God's Eye* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle.

Best Novella (32 nominated)

Assault on a City by Jack Vance; *Born with the Dead* by Robert Silverberg; *Riding the Torch* by Norman Spinrad; *A Song for Lya* by George RR Martin; *Strangers* by Gardner Dozois.

Best Novelette (107 nominated)

Adrift Just Off the Islets of Langerhans . . . by Harlan Ellison; *After the Dreamtime* by Richard Lupoff; *A Brother to Dragons, A Companion to Owls* by Kate Wilhelm; *Extreme Prejudice* by Jerry Pournelle; *Midnight by the Morphy Watch* by Fritz Leiber; *Nix Olympica* by William Walling; *That Thou Art Mindful of Him* by Isaac Asimov.

Best Short Story (139 nominated)

Cathodian Odyssey by Michael Bishop; *The Day Before the Revolution* by Ursula Le Guin; *The Four Hour Fugue* by Alfred Bester; *The Hole Man* by Larry Niven; *Schwartz Between the Galaxies* by Robert Silverberg.

Best Professional Editor (34 nominated)

Jim Baen, Ben Bova, Terry Carr, Ed Ferman, Robert Silverberg, Ted White.

Best Fanzine (89 nominated)

The Alien Critic (Dick Geis); *Algol* (Andrew Porter); *Locus* (Charles and Dena Brown); *Outworlds* (Bill and Joan Bowers); *SF Commentary* (Bruce Gillespie); *Starling* (Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell).

Best Professional Artist (54 nominated)

Steve Fabian, Kelly Freas, Tim Kirk, John Schoenherr, Rick Sternbach.

Best Dramatic Presentation

Flesh Gordon; *Phantom of the Paradise*; *The Questor Tapes*; *Young Frankenstein*; *Zardoz.*

Best Fan Writer (103 nominated)

John Bangsund, Dick Geis, Sandra Miesel, Don C Thompson, Susan Wood.

Best Fan Artist (69 nominated)

George Barr, Grant Canfield, Bill Rotsler, James Shull.

John W Campbell Award for New Writers (Not a Hugo; 58 nominations)

Alan Brennert, Suzy McKee Charnas, Felix Gotschalk, Brenda Pearce, PJ Plauger, John Varley.

Gandalf Award (Not a Hugo; 75 nominations)

Poul Anderson, L Sprague de Camp, Fritz Leiber, Ursula Le Guin, CS Lewis.

This is only a list of those authors, editors, and sf works nominated for the awards, the final ballot will be held at AussieCon and anyone who has paid supporting membership fees will be entitled to vote. A complete list of the Hugo Award winners will be published in a subsequent issue of *SFM*.

RECORDS

Reviewed by Maxim Jakubowski

Flash Fearless Versus the Zorg Women Parts 5 & 6

(Chrysalis CHR 1081)

Science fiction rock strikes again!

Flash Fearless Versus the Zorg Women Parts 5 & 6 is an odd kettle of fish, more like Galactic haddock à la sauce porn. Allegedly uninfluenced by the recent American *Flesh Gordon* cinematic parody, *Flash Fearless* purports to be the soundtrack for a forthcoming stage musical written by Rick Jones, Steve Hammond, Weston Gavin and Dave Pierce. Producer John Alcock got wind of the project and assembled a motley crew of bona fide rock stars to breathe life into the various tunes. The result is highly disappointing. The music is eminently forgettable and the presence of so many musicians from different backgrounds happily jamming together, with John Entwistle of The Who on bass as a backbone, never allows the mood to settle into one uniform stylistic groove. But how could you expect musical unity of any sort with singers as diverse as Alice Cooper, Maddy Prior of Steeleye Span, Jim Dewar of the Robin Trower Band and Jim Dandy of Black Oak Arkansas enrolled on the same platter? None of these feel or sound particularly at ease tackling what is really a lacklustre and unimaginative score. In fact, the singing on the record is never more than just competent, despite the always excellent taste of the various backing musicians like John Weider previously of Family, Mick Grabham of Procol Harum, Robert Johnson of Ox, Eddie Jobson of Roxy Music, etc . . .

What about the science fiction? Well, it's present, you can't deny that. A clumsily drawn all-colour, twelve-page comic strip by Paul Sample outlining the *Flesh Gordon* parody of a story accompanies the record. He's supposed to help the baffled listener to follow the convoluted plot acting as backdrop to the songs, where Flash Fearless zooms through space in the good space-craft *Argo* and battles against the Amazon-like orgiastic women of planet Zorg. But if sf rock can be justified by such intellectual lyrics as:

Out of the blue came this mind-blowing zoo
A collection of mutated crud
Death on their hips, there was foam on their lips
and behind them a shadow of blood
They was space pirates . . .

then I respectfully pass. If only the music was good, but it sure ain't 'the heaviest rock album you've ever heard' as the record's publicity puts it. And I've been around since Buddy Holly days!

Painting Competition Mk. II

Back in *SFM* Vol 2 No 4 we set the second *SFM* painting competition and promised to publish the results by the end of July. Well, we've failed miserably and the result won't be announced until next month: and it won't be until at least *SFM* Vol 2 No 10 or 11 that we shall be able to publish any of the winning paintings. However, all the submissions are of a very high standard and they're well worth waiting for.

The Bitter Pill
by A Bertram Chandler

A Bertram Chandler is the Australian sf writer who has achieved most prominence abroad. His latest novel, The Bitter Pill *represents a departure from his earlier work. It's set in an artificial, brutal, dehumanised Australia of the near future, and delivers a slap in the face to those who see the country's future as being entirely rosy. Not that I find Chandler's vision entirely convincing—his transfer of a typical American subtopia to Australia is slightly off the mark.*

Nevertheless, the novel makes good reading, because Chandler is a highly experienced writer who knows how to present his material, even when it's as bleak as it is here. In The Bitter Pill *a youth movement begins to emerge in Australia. Its growing political influence leads to a situation where everyone on reaching the age of 45 is accorded the status of Senior Citizen, which carries a number of so-called privileges, among them that of voluntary euthanasia. Each Senior Citizen is issued with an identity card, accompanied by a capsule containing a pill which kills painlessly in a few seconds. If the potential suicide changes his mind after breaking open the capsule, he's liable to be sent to a forced labour camp in the Australian desert, or even to a penal colony on Mars.*

This happens to the novel's main character, Paul Clayton, a shipping clerk whose life is so bleak one wonders why he hasn't attempted suicide before. He and his wife quarrel continually, he hates his job and, indeed, life in general. Youth is sacred and old age (meaning anyone over 40) derided; food and drink are artificial; and a climate of cynicism and selfishness seems to have permeated the whole country. Clayton is sent to Mars to help create a fit environment for future colonists. We also follow the fortunes of two others in the same situation: a ship's captain named Starr whose subordinate deliberately opens his capsule so he will be sent away, and Jenny Rivers, a barmaid. All are involved in a convicts' revolution on Mars.

However, the novel isn't totally depressing for several reasons. The characters really live (at least, they did for me) and manage to retain their humanity right to the bitter-sweet ending. Chandler never shies away from sex, and there is an explicit erotic element running through his novel, which includes several scenes of high comedy. But despite the good things in it, I finished The Bitter Pill *feeling uneasy. Frankly, I don't think things will be this bad in Australia in the future. More background could have been given about the rise of the League of Youth, and what exactly happened to make life so awful.*

But if Chandler isn't wholly perceptive in his crystal-ball-gazing, his novel is undoubtedly an important step in Australian sf's development, because it is about Australia and not a planet in another galaxy, and because it's the kind of book which will provoke argument, especially among Australians. You might not agree with what is said in The Bitter Pill, *but you will certainly respond to it.*

(This book can be obtained through the specialist booksellers, or direct from the publishers: Wren Publishing, 33 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, Australia.)

The First and Second Pacific Books of Australian Science Fiction
Edited by John Baxter

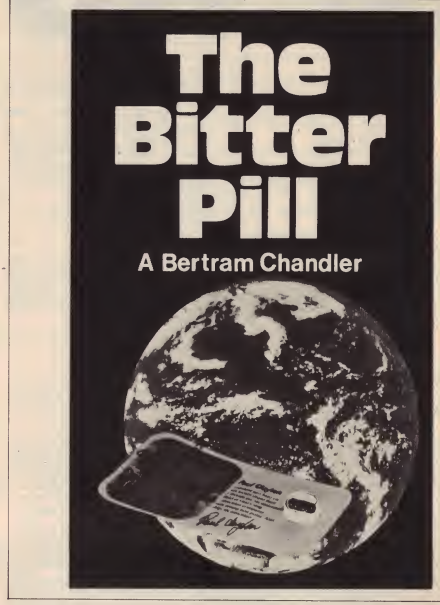
Tell me now, you folks down under
Do you have a sense of wonder?

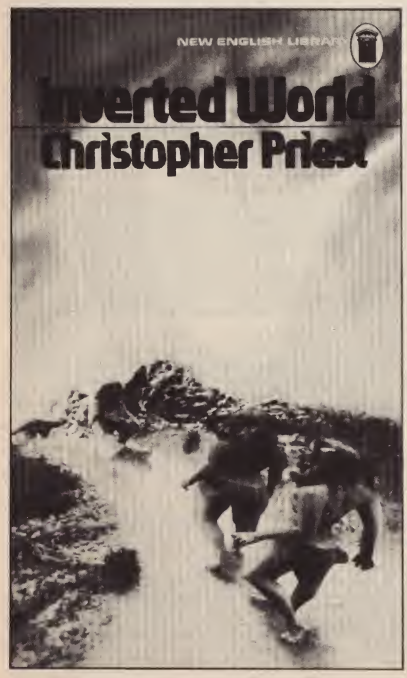
Not so long ago the answer to Robert Bloch's question would have been a resounding 'No'. Whether or not there was an audience for it, very little good Australian science fiction was being published. And, as John Baxter says, 'There was no strong national character in what was produced. It might as well have been written by people from another planet as about them.' Now the situation has changed; not only do Baxter's two ground-breaking anthologies (first published in 1968 and 1971 and now reprinted) give an indication of this change, but they have undoubtedly done a great deal to further the cause of Australian sf. Firstly by showing that self-respecting collections of Australian sf could be compiled, reach a significant audience and receive a good reception from 'mainstream' critics; secondly by proving that Australian sf writers could produce work which was the equal of anything produced in Britain or the USA. Anyone new to Australian sf should start here.

I should declare my prejudice and say that since I'm an Australian, I might be inclined to cast a rather less jaundiced eye on examples of Australian sf than, say, an English critic. However, I doubt if you could find many people who would deny that these anthologies are first-rate. Certainly the standard of writing and general craftsmanship is equal to that found in any anthology of Australian 'mainstream' writing, and in some cases is far superior. My major reservation is that there are too few stories which use specifically Australian themes and imagery. Some of the stories give indications of the direction such sf might take; but few writers seem interested in taking up the challenge. Still, these books are only a beginning, and one shouldn't ask too much. They are certainly much better than anyone had a right to expect.

The first volume presents a fair cross-section of the range of themes and styles Australian sf writers were tackling in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of them (like Frank Roberts' It Could Be You, *a fierce satire on modern TV) show obvious American influences, but are none the worse for that.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28





'A spinning originality grips every page'
The Listener

Inverted World
Christopher Priest

Nominated for a HUGO AWARD

'Best British Writer of Science Fiction 1974'
Elected at the Science Fiction convention 'Seacon'
for his novel 'INVERTED WORLD'

50p

'I had reached the age of six hundred and fifty miles.' So begins the story of Helward Mann who lives in a city constantly on the move in a strange shaped world, shrouded from a mysterious sun . . .

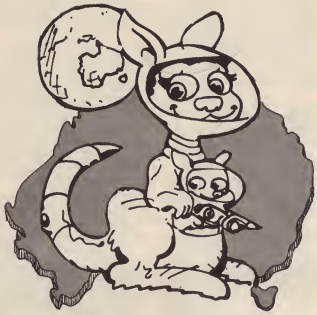
'one of the trickiest and most astonishing twist endings in modern Science Fiction!'
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THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION SCENE

By John Brosnan



This year's WorldCon in Australia has diverted the spotlight away from American and English sf and revealed the fact that very few people know what's happening to Australian science fiction. To fill this gap JOHN BROSNAN, himself an expatriate, has provided us with a potted history of Aussie fandom and an introduction to all the prominent sf authors working there at the moment.

IN 1968 I attended my first science fiction convention, which was held in the tiny clubrooms of the Melbourne sf Club. The total number of attendees was between forty and fifty—not very many compared to an American or even a British convention but it seemed an awful lot of people to me at the time (in my home state of Western Australia I knew of only *one* other sf fan). This August, seven years later, the Melbourne sf fans will be hosting the 1975 World sf Convention, which is quite a coup for such a relatively small group. But, despite its size, the Australian sf community, which is centred mainly in Melbourne, has a long tradition of being a very influential force within science fiction. One area in which its presence has been most strongly felt is that of sf criticism—Australian enthusiasts such as John Foyster, George Turner, John Bangsund and Bruce Gillespie have produced, over the last decade or so, criticism of such a high quality that they have earned the respect and appreciation of most of the top sf writers and fans all over the world.

'As far as contemporary sf is concerned, Australia is lacking in the basic material that makes it possible'

Admittedly, Australia hasn't yet produced a sf writer of the stature of, say, an Isaac Asimov or Brian Aldiss, but it does possess a number of highly competent practioners of the art. One problem that plagues Australian writers, mainstream as well as sf, is the need to produce work that has a uniquely Australian flavour. John Baxter, in the first issue of *The Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1966, wrote:

Australian sf is rare. Only a handful of stories by Australian sf writers have had any distinctive Australian background—Frank Bryning's *Place of the Throwing Stick*, Lee Harding's *Sacrificial*, my own *Takeover Bid*—and all have been failures to some degree. *Place of the Throwing Stick* let an interesting image, the primitive aboriginal faced with a modern rocket ship, stand in for plot and, perhaps more important, any real evocation of the conflict the story was supposed to be concerned with. There is certainly a contrast between Australia's untouched nature and the imported sophistication of places like Woomera, but it needs to be dramatised to become art. *Sacrificial* is magnificent, but it is a story that depends on its atmosphere to make its point, and the atmosphere is not peculiarly Australian. This really is the problem.

The established sf and fantasy themes are rooted in the mythology of America and England rather than of this country. Class conflict, moral standards and other distinctively British themes have little relevance to Australia, just as social progress, the problems of man in a mechanised society, and the conflict between individuality and the necessities of organised existence, are more American than international. Australian writers can and do concern themselves with these questions but they can at best consider them second-hand. There are no especially Australian national social problems. In fact, it sometimes seems that we have no social problems at all. As far as contemporary sf is concerned, Australia is lacking in the basic material that makes it possible.

AUSTRALIA has changed a great deal since that was written, less than ten years ago, but much of what Baxter said still applies. Purely Australian themes and settings that can be utilised for sf are still difficult to find and the answer for most sf writers is to tailor their material to fit a particular market—usually the American one. Baxter himself, who, in the early 1960s when he was appearing regularly in Ted Carnell's British sf magazines, gave the impression that he was going to become *the* major Australian sf writer, has since abandoned the genre for the more lucrative activity of writing about the cinema.

Born in Sydney, Baxter discovered sf at the age of twelve when he came across Murray Leinster's story *First Contact* in a flying book. He later joined the Sydney sf group and edited several of its journals before publishing a fanzine of his own—*Quantum*, which later became *Bunyip*. After working for a few years as a civil servant he then fulfilled another passion of his, involving motion pictures and photography, by joining the Commonwealth Film Unit where he directed several documentaries, one of which was an award winner. In 1968 he edited *The Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction*, Australia's first sf anthology (that same year his sf novel *The God Killers* was published) and in 1969 he wrote *Science Fiction in the Cinema*, which traced the history and development of the sf film. He moved to Britain in 1970 and has since written what seems to be an incredibly large number of books dealing with various aspects of the cinema. He has recently announced a desire to return to sf writing but I have a strong suspicion that fans will have a long wait before that occurs.

ANOTHER name that was very common in Ted Carnell's publications in the early 1960s, along with Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard and John Brunner, was Lee Harding. Harding was one of the original members of the Melbourne sf Club and sold his first story to Carnell in 1960. He continued to appear in both *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* for the next couple of years but his writing output slackened after that due to such distractions as marriage and children, which meant that he had to devote more time to his other, and more profitable, profession—photo-journalism. He made a determined comeback in 1970 when the magazine *Vision of Tomorrow* began. He wrote fulltime for a year and sold everything he wrote: not only to *Vision* but also to USA magazines such as *IF* (his story was given the cover illustration on the April 1971 issue of *IF*). Also in 1970 he wrote and sold to Berkley Books in the USA his first novel, *A World of Shadows*. But though they had paid for it in full Berkley postponed publication indefinitely when the recession began to make its presence felt. At long last a British edition of the novel will be published by Robert Hale later this year.

'1970 was a great year for me', said Harding, 'but there were a few bad ones afterwards. *Vision* folded, and then Ted Carnell died. Ted had been a friend, an editor and an agent for me for more than a dozen years: his passing was a dreadful blow. Even now, several years after the event, I find it hard to believe that this marvellous man, who virtually created the UK sf market, alone and single-handed, was allowed to leave the sf world, which prides itself so much on brotherhood, unsung and forgotten.'

SINCE then Harding has had a great deal of success in Australia and in the UK with a series of children's sf written in Remedial English for slow readers. He also plans to write a straight juvenile sf novel which he hopes will come as close as need be to the high standards of Heinlein and Le Guin. He has also recently edited the first ever hardcover sf anthology to be published in Australia—*Beyond Tomorrow: An Anthology of Modern Science Fiction*, which contains stories from Australian, British and American writers, some of which will be appearing in collected form for the first time.

A well-known sf writer who has now become associated with Australia, though he was born in England, is A Bertram Chandler. He was born in the Army hospital at Aldershot in 1912 but, although his father was a British regular soldier, young Chandler opted for a life at sea. He claims that he was the first seaman in the family since an ancestor, Roger Chandler, was hanged from his own yard-arm for piracy. After leaving school, Chandler went to sea as an apprentice for the Sun Shipping Company in 1928. In 1932 he returned to England to attend the King Edward VII Nautical School in London and later rejoined the Sun Company as a third officer, becoming a first mate during his first tour of duty. In 1936 he joined the Shaw Savill shipping line and while on their ships came to know Australia and New Zealand well. In 1955 a domestic upheaval led him to resign from Shaw Savill and emigrate to Australia where he became third mate on a small coaster that travelled between Australia and New Zealand. He rose rapidly to chief officer and then later became a ship's master.

Chandler's interest in sf began at the age of twelve when he discovered a copy of *The Time Machine* in his school library. Later came Hugo Gernsback's magazine *Science and Invention* and from there he graduated to *Amazing Stories*.

'My boyhood heroes were seamen and spacemen,' said Chandler. 'I was born in the wrong time and place to become one of the latter, but I can, at least, write about them. At which juncture someone is bound to remark that my space stories are really sea stories, and so they are. It was Heinlein who said, quite some time ago, that only people who know ships can write convincingly about spaceships. This is true, I think.'

IT was during the war, while on a convoy run across the Atlantic, that Chandler visited New York for the first time and, as a long-time fan of *Astounding*, decided to pay the editor, John Campbell Jnr, a visit. It was Campbell himself who suggested that Chandler try his hand at writing and so the next time he was in New York he handed Campbell a 4,000-word story called *This Means Wars*. To his surprise, Campbell didn't hand it back, and so Chandler's sf career was launched. During the remaining years of the war he wrote exclusively for *Astounding*, though his rejects appeared in less particular magazines under a pseudonym. As the years went by he became more and more prolific and his stories appeared in almost every sf magazine, but his promotion to chief officer meant that free time became scarce and his output dwindled accordingly. It was only after his move to Australia that he once again began contributing to the magazines, and when the sf magazine boom came to an end in the mid-1950s he switched to writing sf novels.

In issue 22 of John Bangsund's fanzine *Scythrop*, Chandler wrote:

One result of the upheavals in my life was the creation of the Rim Worlds. The resemblance between the Rim Runners—the company owning and operating the Merchant Fleet of the Rim Worlds Confederacy—and my present employers is rather more than coincidental. Rim Runners' ships are officered by refugees from the major shipping lines of the Galaxy, just as the ships in which I now serve are officered by refugees from the major overseas shipping lines. Again, some of our trades are as close to rim-running as you could get on this planet. Years and years ago I was annoyed by the blurb for one of my short stories in the now defunct *Fantastic Universe*. It stated that I was a 'chief officer in the Australian Merchant Marine'. At that time I *was* a chief officer, but in a British liner company. (Today I would say that I was 'Mate of a Pommy Ship . . .') I used to consider myself as an

English writer and I used to think that the late Neville Shute's love affair with Australia was embarrassing to read about. But now that I have seen Alice Springs I can appreciate *A Town Like Alice*, just as I have a deeper understanding of Cordwainer Smith's *Old North Australia* after having travelled through the Northern Territory and northern and central Queensland. My own Rim Worlds series of novels and stories, of course, are more Australian than otherwise. I may not be Australian born, but I like to kid myself that I have become an Australian writer.

ONE name in the Australian sf Hall of Fame that not even many Australian fans have heard of is that of Erle Cox. He was probably Australia's first sf writer and was born in Victoria in 1873, the son of an Irish immigrant. He produced a sizable number of short stories before the First World War, some of which were sf, such as *The Social Code*, which was about a love affair between an Australian astronomer and a Martian woman. But Cox's chief claim to fame lies in a novel he wrote called *Out of the Silence*. Set in Australia, it was about the discovery of a gigantic buried sphere containing the accumulated knowledge of a past civilisation, as well as a beautiful woman in a state of suspended animation. The hero, Alan Dundas, succeeds in penetrating the sphere and awakening the woman who turns out to be a super-being with vast powers. Cox began writing *Out of the Silence* in 1913 but it wasn't published until 1919 when it appeared as a weekly serial in a newspaper called *The Argus*. A book version finally appeared in 1925 in both Australia and Britain and three years later it was published in the USA. It was moderately successful in all three countries but didn't achieve any kind of lasting fame. It was really more of an exotic romance than science fiction and was obviously inspired by the work of writers like H Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Cox spent most of his career as a book and film reviewer for various newspapers, but he did write a further two novels after *Out of the Silence*. His second, *Fool's Harvest*, published in 1939, was a prophetic book about the fall of Singapore and the invasion of Australia by an enemy from the north. His third novel, published in 1947, was along the lines of the work of Thorne Smith with a farcical plot about a Melbourne businessman who sold his soul to the devil in return for some fun and excitement in his life. Cox died in 1950 and, unfortunately, all his books are now out of print.

Another sf writer associated with Australia is Jack Wodhams, though, like A Bertram Chandler, he was born in England (in London, 1931). He later migrated to Australia and after a variety of jobs decided to try and break into writing. Living frugally in a remote part of Queensland, he experimented with all the various writing markets but it wasn't until he attempted sf that he had his first real success. As a result he became a regular contributor to *Analog* and, later, other magazines. Though he had no previous interest in sf, his success in the field led him to become involved with sf fandom in Australia and he has subsequently attended several conventions (he was Guest of Honour at two of them), and has appeared frequently in the letter columns of both Australian and American fanzines.

Someone else with a foot in both the professional and fannish Australian sf camps is Ron Graham, whose interest in sf goes all the way back to the 1930s when he had a letter published in an issue of *Amazing*. But sf remained just a hobby with him until 1969 when, as a successful design engineer and owner of the Graham group of companies, he decided to publish a professional sf magazine. (Australia has never had its own original sf magazine. During the boom of the 1950s a couple of sf magazines were published in Australia but they contained only reprints from overseas.)

Graham's magazine, called *Vision of Tomorrow*, was published in Britain and edited by Phil Harbottle. It featured the work of both Australian and British writers and, though it was rather crude to begin with, it was developing into an interesting magazine when distribution problems forced it to fold after issue number 12. Ron Graham is still deeply involved in sf; he has one of the world's largest collections of sf magazines and books in his Sydney home, is a familiar sight at World sf Conventions and has provided financial backing for a number of sf projects within Australia, including the Space Age Bookshop, the hub of sf activity in Melbourne.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are a number of other people who have dabbled in professional sf, and the names of several will probably be familiar to British readers —such as Damien Broderick, David Rome, Robert Bowden, David Grigg, Ron Smith (an ex-American fan), and a newcomer, a lady, called Cherry Wilder who has had, so far, two stories published in Ken Bulmer's *New Writings in SF*.

ORGANISED sf fandom in Australia goes back a long way—almost as far, in fact, as it does in the USA. The first known gathering of fans in Australia took place in Sydney in 1935 and consisted of three young members of Hugo Gernsback's international Science Fiction League. They formed a Sydney chapter of the League but it only lasted until the end of 1936. The following year four Sydney high school students discovered that they had a common interest in sf and began publishing a small hand-written fanzine called *Spacehounds* which ran for ten weekly issues. One of these students, William Veney, was later instrumental, in 1939, in contacting sf fans all over Australia, including JK Moxon in Queensland, Donald Tuck (who was later to become well known for his sf bibliographies) in Tasmania, Marshall MacLennan in Victoria and John Devern in South Australia. It was Devern who produced Australia's first printed fanzine, the *Science Fiction Review*, but only eighteen copies were printed and there was no second issue. Devern was obliged to give up his interest in sf shortly afterwards in exchange for the army and was never heard of again in sf circles.

At the first formal meeting of the Junior Australian sf Correspondence Club, organised by Veney and other Sydney fans in 1939, it was decided to produce a fan magazine to be called *Australian Fan News*. As with *Science Fiction Review*, only one issue ever appeared, but at least its print run was somewhat higher—two hundred copies. That year another sf club was formed in Sydney, the Junior Science Club, which consisted of a group of young students headed by Vol Molesworth. For a brief period the two clubs were rivals, bitterly competing over new members, but both clubs closed in late 1939. Veney, meanwhile, had been corresponding with prominent American fans such as Fred Pohl and Donald Wollheim. Wollheim was then head of the Futurian Society of New York ('Futurian' was defined as being someone interested in the future) and when Veney mentioned his plans for a new club Wollheim suggested he call it the Sydney Futurian Society, which he did. But Sydney's Futurian Society, when it was formed, consisted of members from both the former rival clubs with the result that the two factions spent a lot of time arguing with each other. Of course, at first, the Society was just a group of schoolboys and it's understandable that there should have been some petty squabbling, but the feuding continued right up until the Society came to an end in the 1960s.

Sf fandom may have originated in Sydney but it was in Melbourne that Australian fans proved to be most productive, and it's appropriate that Australia's first World Convention should be held in that city. One of the earliest Melbourne sf fans was Marshall McLennan who became interested in sf in 1928 after buying a copy of *Amazing Stories*. It was a letter that McLennan wrote to *Astounding* in 1935 that led him into contact with fans in America and Britain. He began corresponding with such sf luminaries as Harry Warner Jnr and Sam Moskowitz in the USA and with Walter Gillings in Britain. McLennan also came into contact with other Melbourne fans, as well as Tasmanian Don Tuck, and irregular meetings were held in various people's homes, before and during the war years.

After the war Melbourne fandom continued in its relaxed and informal way, despite the efforts of Sydney fan William Veney to organise the Melbourne group into a body with iron-clad rules, office-bearers and so on (Sydney fans have always been obsessed with such trivia, for some reason). However, in the early 1950s the Melbourne sf Group was officially formed, due mainly to the persistence of Veney. It held its first meeting on 14 August 1952 in a place called Val's Coffee Lounge. Only five members attended that night but by the following November thirty people were regularly turning up. The membership in those days included McLennan, Race Mathews, Bob McCubbin, Dick Jenssen, Lee Harding and Mervyn Binns. The latter was instrumental in causing the membership increase; he began the practice of inserting advertising material about the MSFG into the sf magazines and books at the bookshop, McGills, where he then worked.

'I went there and watched these freaky old guys swapping dirty old sf pulp magazines and it was enough to turn me off fandom for quite some time'

Shortly after its formation the MSFG rented a room in which to hold its meeting and to store its ever-growing collection of sf. It has remained in existence ever since then (though along the way it became the Melbourne sf Club), moving at first from rented room to rented room before, in 1963, it settled in a loft behind McGill's bookshop at 19 Somerset Place, which was large enough to seat up to a hundred people, which it often did when the MSFC Film Society (created by Mervyn Barrett and now run by Paul Stevens) showed films there. It was this latter activity that caused the City Health Department to step in in 1970 and ask the club to move elsewhere, which it was obliged to do. For a time it was back to rented rooms but now the MSFC resides above the Space Age Bookshop, run by the ever-reliable Mervyn Binns who finally left McGill's in 1971 to go into business for himself.

A very influential member of the club has been John Foyster who became involved with it in the late 1950s.

'I was caught up in sf in a moment of weakness', said Foyster recently. 'I was flat on my back in a hospital in 1956, and facing two months or more of the same, and I was willing to read anything. One of the first things that happened along was a handful of sf magazines, and by the time I got out of hospital I had read quite a bit of sf. After that I haunted secondhand bookshops and gradually built up a modest collection, and I started to buy *Etherline* (the MSFC's official magazine) at McGill's which I used to read with enthusiasm but I didn't really want to get mixed up with that crazy Buck Rogers crowd. However, in 1958, when a convention was held at the Richmond Town Hall I decided to go and take a look. So I went there and watched these freaky old guys swapping dirty old sf pulp magazines and it was enough to turn me off fandom for quite some time. But in 1959 I began to occasionally attend MSFC meetings and at the end of that year I was subscribing to some of the better US fanzines, which were a long way from *Etherline* in quality. In 1960 I came into contact with John Baxter and started writing for his fanzine, and the following year published my own first fanzine, *Emanation*.'

IN 1966 Foyster was responsible for a renaissance within Australian fandom when he organised the first Melbourne convention since 1958. It took place in the MSFC clubrooms and generated such a great deal of enthusiasm that, towards the end, a suggestion was made to keep the spirit of the occasion alive by starting a magazine. The result was *The Australian Science Fiction Review*, which became the most popular Australian fanzine overseas and was nominated for a Hugo in 1967 and 1968. It contained criticism and writing of the highest standard and attracted the support of such noted writers as Brian Aldiss and James Blish. During its run it also served to act as a focus for sf fans throughout Australia and was partly responsible for the formation of a new group in Sydney (unconnected with the Futurians) called The Sydney sf Foundation.

The person who made the suggestion to start the magazine, and who subsequently became its editor, was a cultivated young man by the name of John Bangsund. He has since become one of Australia's best-known sf personalities and his writing is rated among the best ever to appear in fanzines (to date, unfortunately, he hasn't shown much inclination to extend his writing talents outside of fandom).

'After leaving school', he said, 'I enjoyed myself immensely for a decade or so wallowing in the world's best books, and if anyone ever mentioned the words "science fiction" in my presence I would just look pityingly at him, as an Olympic champion might look at someone talking about the fun to be had playing dominoes. But at the ripe old age of twenty-five I met an amiable sort of bloke who was as interested in good books and classical music as I was, and we talked for hours about these things. I knew right from the start that he not only read sf but also wrote the stuff, but everyone has some harmless eccentricity you have to forgive if you are to get on with people, and he was tactful enough not to talk too much about it. Tactful? The man was diabolically cunning! Before I had known him six months he had turned me into an addict! The funny thing is that I was on my guard all the time, but he broke through it; he handed me a story by Arthur C Clarke called *The Star*, and asked me to read it so we could talk about the theology in it. That's how it all started. So I want it clearly understood: anything I have done in the science fiction line is all Lee Harding's fault.'

THOUGH the convention in August will be Australia's first World Con, ordinary conventions have been held in various cities since the early 1950s. One of the first, though it was more of a conference than a convention, was held by the Sydney Futurians in December, 1940. Ten people attended. The following year they held another and this time *twelve* people attended but, as usual with the Futurians, the only thing that took place was a great deal of arguing. It wasn't until the 1950s that proper sf conventions were held in Sydney. Organised by Lyell Crane in 1952 the first one had approximately sixty members. It was relatively successful and Crane organised the second Sydney convention the following year which had eighty-five attendees, five of whom were from out-of-state. The convention became a regular event in Sydney each year until 1956 when it was held for the first time in Melbourne. It coincided with the Olympic Games that were being held in Melbourne that year and it was called, appropriately enough, the Olympicon. It was quite a large affair for Australia at that time, the paid-up membership was one hundred and fifty, and was very successful. It even attracted some attention from the newspapers, though it was more than slightly over-shadowed by the Olympic Games. The next Australian convention, which was of a similar size, was also held in Melbourne two years later. But for some reason, Australian fannish activity went into the doldrums after that and it wasn't until eight years later that another con was held—the previously mentioned one in 1966 organised by John Foyster. Since then conventions have been held much more frequently, sometimes as many as two or three in the same year in different states. In 1970 Sydney had its first con after a gap of fifteen years. Called the Syncon, it was held in a Girl Guide's hall in Epping but it was a great success and attracted several interstate visitors. Since then there have been cons in Queensland and South Australia too.

It was at Syncon '70, and later at the Melbourne Con held in Easter that year, that the proposal to host the 1975 World Convention was first considered, then seriously put forward. The ring-leader, as ever, was John Foyster, aided and abetted by John Bangsund and Leigh Edmonds. Since then the Melbourne group, with the support of fans all over the country, have put a tremendous amount of work into the planning and organising of the Con. This effort became even more intensive after the Australian bid for the Con was confirmed at the World Con held in Toronto in 1973. Apart from Foyster, a lot of the work has come from Robin Johnson (formerly of England), David Grigg and Leigh Edmonds.

The AussieCon, to be held in Melbourne's luxurious Southern Cross Hotel, will be the culmination of the efforts of not only the Con committee but also of all those Australian fans who, over the years, have tried to promote sf and sf fandom. Let us hope that the Con won't serve as a termination point to those efforts but will, instead, promote within Australia an even greater interest in sf and its attendant pleasures.

John Brosnan would like to extend his thanks to John Bangsund, Lee Harding, Allan J Tompkins, Shayne McCormack, A Bertram Chandler, and John Foyster.

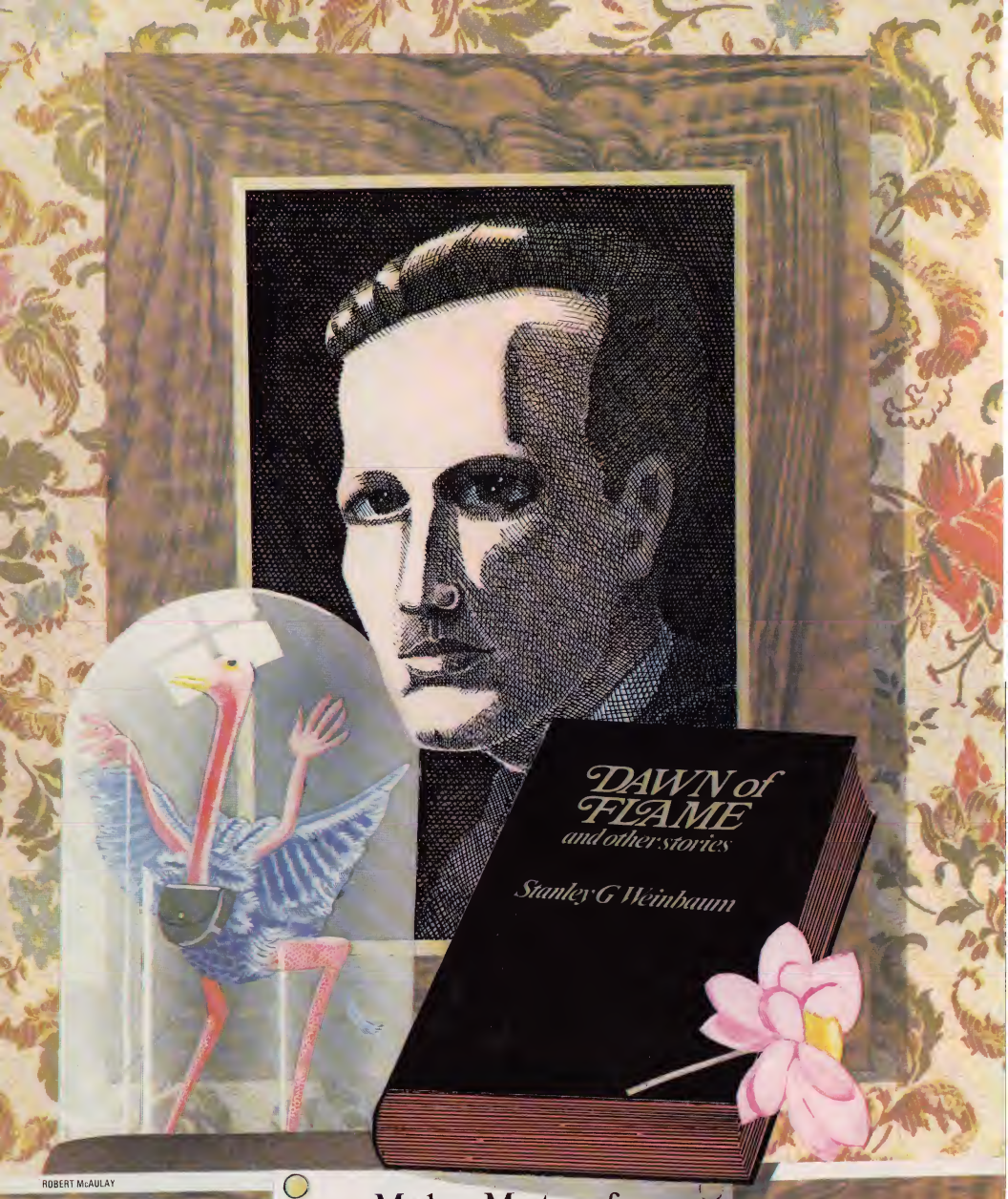

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He brought new life to science fiction . . . but the flame of his genius was soon to be extinguished

By Walter Gillings

13: STANLEY G WEINBAUM

In a recent issue of science fiction classics spanning a whole century of writing, the collected short stories of Stanley G Weinbaum represent the most modern examples of the genre among twenty-three volumes*. That this distinction should have been conferred on a writer whose contributions were comparatively few, and which are mostly unknown to today's readers, is due to no mere whim of Sam Moskowitz, who was responsible for the selection. For Weinbaum's was a rare talent which, if it did not amount to genius, was enough to exert a refreshing influence at a time when it was most needed.

It showed itself in 1934 during the gloomy days of economic depression when science fiction was at its lowest ebb. It flowered quickly and died all too soon, only eighteen months after his first appearance in *Wonder Stories*. Among the mostly undistinguished, often amateurish material on which Hugo Gernsback's magazine was struggling to keep its masthead above water, *A Martian Odyssey* made an outstanding impression. In due course managing editor Charles D Hornig disclosed that it had earned more praise from readers than any other story in *Wonder*'s five-year career.

At the time, to offset the competition of the reborn *Astounding Stories*, the Gernsback pulp was striving to implement a much-vaunted 'new story' policy which insisted on novelty of conception as the main ingredient of its fiction. Weinbaum's tale of an expedition's encounter with the peculiar forms of life on Mars, especially the intelligent Tweel with his ostrich-like appearance, was not only highly original but written in a gentle, humorous style that made it altogether different from the usual run. And Tweel, who contrasted delightfully with the customary monsters, went down instantly in the gallery of science fiction's unforgettable characters, while his creator was hailed as the discovery of the decade.

But though the name of Stanley Grauman Weinbaum was new to science fiction, the medium was not unknown to him. He had read *Amazing Stories* since it started eight years before, and had grown up with the works of the great originators from Mary Shelley onwards. Graduating in chemical engineering at the University of Wisconsin, he had started to write fiction in his early twenties and had achieved some success. A romantic novel, *The Lady Dances*, was syndicated in the early 1930s under the by-line Marge Stanley, derived from his wife's name and his own. With his sister Helen he had written an operetta which has never been produced, as well as several novels—two of them science fiction—which had not been published up to the time of his debut in *Wonder*.

For this beginning, science fiction is partly indebted to the veteran author of the *Radio Man* stories featured by *Argosy* in the 1920s, the former Wisconsin senator Roger Sherman Hoar, who wrote under the name Ralph Milne Farley. It was he who persuaded Weinbaum to venture into the field when both were members of the Milwaukee Fictioneers, a group of a dozen professional writers who met in each other's homes and would not admit women. In 1935 they were joined by Robert Bloch, who shared Weinbaum's interest in the work of James Branch Cabell and who remembers him as a good-looking, soft-spoken Southerner, a native of Louisville. Another member was Lawrence Keating, well known for his Western stories—which, Weinbaum is on record as saying, furnished him with plots for his own tales in more outlandish settings.

The first of these having proved so popular, editor Hornig soon requested a sequel, which Weinbaum had no difficulty in supplying; it followed four months later, before the year was out. *Valley of Dreams* was, in fact, little more than an earlier version of *A Martian Odyssey* which the author revised and extended to produce the second story. But if it was the mixture as before, it was quite agreeable to *Wonder*'s readers; the touch of novelty was still there. It persisted, too, in his third story, *Flight on Titan*, which introduced some more original life-forms inhabiting Saturn's moon; though this was not 'new' enough for Hornig, who rejected the story—which duly appeared in *Astounding*, where editor F Orlin Tremaine was awaiting the chance to recruit the sensational newcomer.

So, early in 1935, with *Parasite Planet*, began the memorable trilogy of space-travelogues featuring Ham Hammond and Pat Burlingame, whose excursions on Venus and Uranus gave Weinbaum excuse to add several more varieties to his ingenious interplanetary menagerie. The slight romantic interest, uncommon in science fiction, gave piquancy to the entertaining narrative; and Oscar, the philosophical cave-dweller of *The Lotus Eaters*, proved almost as engaging as Tweel. Only with the third story, *The Planet of Doubt*, did it seem that Weinbaum might be making hay while the sun shone.

Indeed, by now his work was winning the monetary rewards which had eluded him in the past; but he did not desert *Wonder* altogether, in spite of its paltry payments. Though they hardly compared with his interplanetary stories, a series of three tales about Professor van Manderpootz, beginning with *The Worlds of If*, contained some fascinating speculation and amusing incidents based on the kind of original thinking the magazine demanded.

His attempts to accomplish something more than the pulps required in those days were not successful, however. *Dawn of Flame*, a short novel about a beautiful temptress in which he strived for an emotional appeal, failed to please any editor. A second, much longer version retitled *The Black Flame*, in which the science-fantasy element was combined with adventurous action against a colourful background, proved no more acceptable. Disappointed, Weinbaum was obliged to resort to the current magazine formula which he had varied enough to bring him success.

With his stories appearing every month in one magazine or the other in the latter half of 1935, his future still seemed assured—to all outward appearances. It even became necessary—and advisable, since he was determined to break fresh ground—to submit some of his material under a pen-name, which he borrowed from his grandfather, John Jessel. As it turned out, it appeared in print only once, in *Astounding*. *The Adaptive Ultimate* concerns a miraculous serum which transforms an invalid girl into a deathless beauty—until her lover, fearful of her powers, halts the process. In terms of popular appeal, this is undoubtedly Weinbaum's most effective story. After being anthologised in 1941, it was dramatised several times on both radio and television besides being made into a film entitled *She-Devil*.

In the same issue, under Weinbaum's own by-line, was the story of *The Red Peri*, a woman space-pirate as bold as she was desirable. He intended the character to sustain a new series, but she did not get beyond her first daring exploit. On another page, editor Tremaine informed his well-wishers that Weinbaum had been very ill. Four months before, he had been confined to bed for several weeks following a tonsil operation, and he had just started writing again when further complications set in, necessitating X-ray treatments which left him exhausted; yet he went on working.

Having collaborated with his friend Farley in a crime story, *Yellow Slaves*, he joined with him in producing several other pieces including *Smothered Seas*, an *Astounding* novelette concerning a mysterious weed that chokes the world's oceans and overruns the continents. This was among several of his stories which Weinbaum did not live to see in print. With the publication of *Redemption Cairn*, an interplanetary adventure, early in 1936, editor Tremaine queried, 'Did you know that Stanley Weinbaum took off on the Last Great Journey through the galaxies in December? . . . He created a niche for himself which will be hard to fill.'

Only then did Tremaine learn the true identity of John Jessel, whose second story, *Proteus Island*, in which all life on a South Sea island is transformed by radiation, had proved generally unacceptable. Then he had second thoughts, and ran the story under Weinbaum's own name. The new *Thrilling Wonder* also welcomed *The Circle of Zero*, one of his more abstruse pieces, and followed it with *The Brink of Infinity*, an effort dating back to his apprenticeship days which was none the less appreciated. Even *Amazing* salvaged something from the wreck before it was taken over in 1937: *Shifting Seas*, in which the Gulf Stream is diverted, leaving Europe freezing, had been accepted just before his death, when he was working on a story to be called *The Dictator's Sister*. This was completed by Farley and presented by the new *Amazing* in 1938 as *Revolution of 1950*.

The plaudits Weinbaum received at his passing were enough to ensure that all his writings would be preserved eventually, including those which had previously been rejected. His associates of the Milwaukee Fictioneers—among them Raymond A Palmer, *Amazing*'s new editor—promptly compiled a Memorial Volume presenting *Dawn of Flame and Other Stories* in an edition of only 250 copies. Painstakingly type-set and printed on an amateur press, it was the first publication of its kind in the genre. With black leather covers, gold lettering and crimson edges, it looked more like a bible. Now, it is almost priceless.

It was left to *Startling Stories* to give *The Black Flame* a chance to illumine its first issue, three years after Weinbaum's death. Six months later, *Thrilling Wonder* featured *Dawn of Flame* as 'a story that will be as immortal as its author'. And before the end of 1939 editor Palmer had engineered the book publication of *The New Adam*, a novel about a superman with romantic inclinations over which, it was said, the author had laboured for nine years before his rise to fame. In spite of the ballyhoo, however, the effort was only too obvious; yet the magic attaching to Weinbaum's name was enough to justify the story's presentation in *Amazing* in 1943.

Nor was that the end of the exhumation process. In 1948, a novel that was believed to represent his first attempt at science-fantasy, *The Mad Brain*, was advertised for sale to the highest bidder who would undertake to publish it, after it had been declined by all the magazines. In 1950, a specialist house in Los Angeles issued it as a collector's item, with the title changed to *The Dark Other*. Seven years later, one of his detective stories appeared in a mystery magazine as *Green Glow of Death*.

Meanwhile, his earlier tales were being reprinted as 'classics' and collected in three handsome volumes by the Fantasy Press. When the first of these appeared in 1949, *Time* magazine devoted a page to 'the science fiction fad', poking fun at Weinbaum's doughpots, loonies, slinkers and other 'dream-beasts' which lured so many of his contemporaries—notably Eric Frank Russell, Henry Kuttner and John Russell Fearn—into new areas of conception. Though Russell soon went his own way, Fearn virtually took on another identity in the attempt to emulate Weinbaum's inventive flair; while *Thrilling Wonder*'s *Hollywood on the Moon* series, in which Kuttner joined with Arthur K Barnes, was deliberately contrived in imitation of the Ham Hammond stories in *Astounding*.

Weinbaum's sister, Helen Kasson, also followed in his wake. After writing mystery stories, she made her debut in *Thrilling Wonder* in 1938 with *Tidal Moon*, which was based on a brief outline left by her elder brother; and over the next few years she contributed to several magazines under the name of Helen Weinbaum. 'Even as a child I must have sensed his genius; I let him lead me where he would,' she recollected in a glowing tribute. Yet, though the extent of his influence has never been disputed, the question whether he actually merited the fulsome praise he received has been argued time and again ever since he died.

'If he had lived, he would undoubtedly have surpassed even Jules Verne and HG Wells,' wrote Farley in his obituary. 'If he had lived', echoed Otto Binder, 'he would eventually have earned a place alongside such masters of fantasy as Verne, Wells, Merritt and Burroughs.' Others, wiser after the events which led to the expansion of science fiction, have concluded that if his exceptional talent had remained in check a little longer, it would not have been any more conspicuous than that of Heinlein, Sturgeon, Asimov and the rest. There is always an *if*—a word which in Weinbaum's book seems to have had a special significance. His inspiration for *The Worlds of If* came from the poem quoted by van Manderpootz:

Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these:
It might have been.

**A Martian Odyssey and Other Science Fiction Tales: The Collected Short Stories of Stanley G Weinbaum.* Hyperion Press, Westport, Connecticut, USA.

THE STORIES OF STANLEY G WEINBAUM

These are listed in chronological order as published in the USA. Dates in brackets indicate UK publication. Paperback editions (pb) are included only where there was no previous hardcover edition.

Novels:
1939 (pb **1974**): The New Adam.
1948: The Black Flame (*with* Dawn of Flame).
1950: The Dark Other.

Short story collections:
1936: Dawn of Flame and Other Stories (*Memorial Volume*).
1949: A Martian Odyssey and Others.
1952: The Red Peri.
1974 (pb): The Best of Stanley G Weinbaum.
1974: A Martian Odyssey and Other Science Fiction Tales.



I STOPPED ON THE WAY TO STATEN AIRPORT to call up, and that was a mistake since I had a chance of making it otherwise. But the office was affable.

'We'll hold the ship five minutes for you,' the clerk said. 'That's the best we can do.' So I rushed back to my taxi and we spun off to the third level and sped across the Staten Bridge like a comet treading a steel rainbow.

I had to be in Moscow by evening for the opening of bids on the Ural Tunnel. The Government required the personal presence of an agent of each bidder; but the firm should have known better than to send me, even though the NJ Wells Corporation is, so to speak, my father. I have an undeserved reputation for being late for everything; something always comes up to prevent me from getting anywhere on time. It's never *my* fault.

This time it was a chance encounter with my old physics professor, old Haskel van Manderpootz. I couldn't very well just say 'hello' and 'goodbye' to him; I'd been a favourite of his back in the college days of 2014. And I missed the airliner, of course. I was still on the Staten Bridge when I heard the roar of the catapult and the Soviet rocket *Baikal* hummed over us like a tracer bullet with a long tail of flame.

We got the contract anyway. The firm wired our man in Beirut and he flew up to Moscow. But it didn't help my reputation. However, I felt a great deal better when I saw the evening papers. The *Baikal*, flying at the north edge of the eastbound lane to avoid a storm, had locked wings with a British fruitship and all but a hundred of her five hundred passengers were lost. I had almost become 'the late Dixon Wells' in a grimmer sense.

I'd made an engagement for the following week with old van Manderpootz. It seems he's transferred to New York University as head of the department of Newer Physics—that is, of Relativity. He deserved it; the old chap was a genius if ever there was one. Even now, eight years out of college, I remember more from his course than from half a dozen other hazards on the path to an engineer's education. So on Tuesday night I dropped in—an hour or so late, to tell the truth, since I'd forgotten about the engagement until mid-evening. He was reading, in a room as disorderly as ever.

'Humph!' he grunted. 'Time changes everything but habit, I see. You were a good student, Dick, but I seem to recall that you always arrived in class towards the middle of the lecture.'

'I had a course in East Hall just before,' I explained. 'I couldn't seem to make it in time.'

'Well, it's time you learned to be on time,' he growled. Then his eyes twinkled. 'Time!' he ejaculated. 'The most fascinating word in the language. Here we've used it five times (there goes the sixth time—and the seventh!) in the first minute of conversation. Each of us understands the other, yet science is just beginning to learn its meaning. Science? I mean that *I* am beginning to learn.'

I sat down. 'You and science are synonymous,' I grinned. 'Aren't you one of the world's outstanding physicists?'

'One of them!' he snorted. '*One* of them, eh! And who are the others?'

'Oh, Corveille and Hastings and Shrimski . . . '

'Bah! Would you mention them in the same breath with the name of van Manderpootz? A pack of jackals, eating the crumbs of ideas that drop from my feast of thoughts! Had you gone back into the last century, now—had you mentioned Einstein and de Sitter—there, perhaps, are names worthy to rank with (or just below) van Manderpootz!'

I grinned again in amusement.

'Einstein *is* considered pretty good, isn't he?' I remarked. 'After all, he was the first to tie time and space to the laboratory. Before him they were just philosophical concepts.'

'He didn't!' rasped the Professor. 'Perhaps in a dim, primitive fashion he showed the way, but I—*I*, van Manderpootz—am the first to seize time, drag it into my laboratory and perform an experiment on it.'

'Indeed! And what sort of experiment?'

'What experiment other than simple measurement is it possible to perform?' he snapped.

'Why . . . I don't know. To travel in it?'

'Exactly.'

'Like these time machines that are so popular in the magazines? To go into the future or the past?'

'Bah! Many bahs! The future or the past—pfui! It needs no van Manderpootz to see the fallacy in that. Einstein showed us that much.'

'How? It's conceivable, isn't it?'

'Conceivable? And you, Dixon Wells, studied under van Manderpootz!' He grew red with emotion, then grimly calm. 'Listen to me. You know how time varies with the speed of a system—Einstein's relativity?'

'Yes.'

'Very well. Now suppose that the great engineer Dixon Wells invents a machine capable of travelling very fast, enormously fast, nine-tenths as fast as light. Do you follow? Good. You then fuel this miracle ship for a little jaunt of a half-million miles which, since mass (and with it inertia) increases according to the Einstein formula with increasing speed, takes all the fuel in the world. But you solve that. You use atomic energy. Then, since at nine-tenths light-speed your ship weighs about as much as the Sun you disintegrate North America to give you sufficient motive power. You start off at that speed, a hundred and sixty-eight thousand miles per second, and you travel for two hundred and four thousand miles. The acceleration has now crushed you to death, but you have penetrated the future.' He paused, grinning sardonically. 'Haven't you?'

'Yes.'

'And how far?'

I hesitated.

'Use your Einstein formula!' he screeched. 'How far? I'll tell you. *One second!*' He grinned triumphantly. 'That's how possible it is to travel into the future. And as for the past—in the first place, you'd have to exceed light-speed which immediately entails the use of more than an infinite number of horse-powers. We'll assume that the great engineer Dixon Wells solves that little problem too, even though the energy output of the whole universe is not an infinite number of horse-powers. Then he applies this more than infinite power to travel at two hundred and four thousand miles per second for *ten* seconds. He has then penetrated the past. How far?'

Again I hesitated.

'I'll tell you. *One second!*' He glared at me. Now all you have to do is to design such a machine, and then van Manderpootz will admit the possibility of travelling into the future for a limited number of seconds. As for the past, I have just explained that all the energy in the universe is insufficient for that.'

'But,' I stammered, 'you just said that you . . . '

'I did *not* say anything about travelling into either future or past, which I have just demonstrated to you to be impossible—a practical impossibility in the one case and an absolute one in the other.'

'Then how *do* you travel in time?'

'Not even van Manderpootz can perform the impossible,' said the Professor, now faintly jovial. He tapped a thick pad of typewriter paper on the table beside him. 'See, Dick, this is the world, the universe.' He swept a finger down it. 'It is long in time and'—sweeping his hand across—'it is broad in space, but'—now jabbing his finger against its centre—'it is very thin in the fourth dimension. Van Manderpootz takes always the shortest, most logical course. I do not travel *along* time, into past or future. No. Me, I travel *across* time, sideways!'

I gulped. 'Sideways into time! What's there?'

'What would naturally be there?' he snorted. 'Ahead is the future; behind is the past. Those are real, the worlds of past and future. What worlds are neither past nor future—but contemporary and yet extemporal—existing, as it were, in time parallel to our time?'

I shook my head.

'Idiot!' he snapped. 'The conditional worlds, of course! The world's of "if"'. Ahead are the worlds to be; behind are the worlds that were; to either side are the worlds that might have been—the worlds of "if"!'

'Eh?' I was puzzled. 'Do you mean that you can see what will happen if I do such and such?'

'No!' he snorted. 'My machine does not reveal the past or predict the future. It will show, as I told you the conditional worlds. You might express it by, "if I had done such and such, so and so would have happened". The worlds of the subjunctive mode.'

'Now how the devil does it do that?'

'Simple, for van Manderpootz! I use polarised light, polarised not in the horizontal or vertical planes but in the direction of the fourth dimension—an easy matter. One uses Iceland spar under colossal pressures, that is all. And since the worlds are very thin in the direction of the fourth dimension, the thickness of a single light wave, though it be but millionths of an inch, is sufficient. A considerable improvement over time-travelling in past or future, with its impossible velocities and ridiculous distances.'

'But . . . are those . . . worlds of "if" . . . real?'

'Real? What is real? They are real, perhaps, in the sense that two is a real number as opposed to the square root of minus two, which is imaginary. They are the worlds that would have been *if* . . . Do you see?'

I nodded. 'Dimly. You could see, for instance, what New York would have been like if England had won the Revolution instead of the Colonies.'

'That's the principle, true enough. But you couldn't see that on the machine. Part of it, you see, is a Horsten psychomat (stolen from one of *my* ideas, by the way), and you, the user, become part of the device. Your own mind is necessary to furnish the background. For instance, if George Washington could have used the mechanism after the signing of peace he could have seen what you suggest. We can't. You can't even see what would have happened if I hadn't invented the thing, but *I* can. Do you understand?'

'Of course. You mean the background has to rest in the past experiences of the user.'

'You're growing brilliant,' he scoffed.

'Yes. The device will show ten hours of what would have happened *if* . . . condensed, of course, as in a movie, to half an hour's actual time.'

'Say, that sounds interesting!'

'You'd like to see it? Is there anything you'd like to find out . . . any choice you'd alter?'

'I'll say . . . a thousand of 'em! I'd like to know what would have happened if I'd sold out my stocks in 2009 instead of '10. I was a millionaire in my own right then, but I was a little . . . well, a little late in liquidating.'

'As usual,' remarked van Manderpootz. 'Let's go over to the laboratory, then.'

THE PROFESSOR'S QUARTERS were but a block from the campus. He ushered me into the Physics Building and thence into his own research laboratory, much like the one I had visited during my courses under him. The device—he called it his 'Subjunctivisor,' since it operated in hypothetical worlds—occupied the centre table. Most of it was merely a Horsten psychomat, but glittering crystalline and glassy was the prism of Iceland spar, the polarising agent that was the heart of the instrument.

Van Manderpootz pointed to the headpiece. 'Put it on,' he said, and I sat staring at the screen of the psychomat.

I suppose everyone is familiar with the Horsten psychomat; it was as much a fad a few years ago as the ouija board a century back. Yet it isn't just a toy. Sometimes, much as the ouija board, it's a real aid to memory. A maze of vague and coloured shadows is caused to drift slowly across the screen, and one watches them, meanwhile visualising whatever scene or circumstances he is trying to remember. He turns a knob which alters the arrangement of lights and shadows, and when by chance the design corresponds to his mental picture—presto! There is his scene re-created under his eyes.

Of course, his own mind adds the details. All the screen actually shows are those tinted blobs of light and shadow, but the thing can be amazingly real. I've seen occasions when I could have sworn the psychomat showed pictures almost as sharp and detailed as reality itself; the illusion is sometimes as startling as that.

Van Manderpootz switched on the light, and the play of shadows began. Now recall the circumstances of, say, a half-year after the market crash. Turn the knob until the picture clears, then stop. At that point I direct the light of the Subjunctivisor upon the screen, and you have nothing more to do than watch.'

I did as he directed. Momentary pictures formed and vanished. The inchoate sounds of the device hummed like distant voices, but without the added suggestion of the picture they meant nothing. My own face flashed and dissolved and then, finally, I had it. There was a picture of myself sitting in an ill-defined room; that was all. I released the knob and gestured.

A click followed. The light dimmed, then brightened. The picture cleared and, amazingly, another figure emerged—a woman. I recognised her. It was Whimsy White, erstwhile star of television and premiere of the Vision Varieties of '09. She was changed in that picture, but I recognised her.

I'll say I did! I'd been trailing her all through the boom years of '07 to '10, trying to marry her, while old NJ raved and ranted and threatened to leave everything to the Society for Rehabilitation of the Gobi Desert. I think those threats were what kept her from accepting me, but after I took my own money and ran it up to a couple of million in that crazy market of '08 and '09, she softened.

Temporarily, that is. When the crash of the spring of '10 came and bounced me back on my father and into the firm of NJ Wells, her favour dropped a dozen points to the market's one. In February we were engaged, in April we were hardly speaking. In May they sold me out. I'd been late again.

And now there she was on the psychomat screen, obviously plumping out, and not nearly so pretty as memory had pictured her. She was staring at me with an expression of enmity, and I was glaring back. The buzzes became voices.

'You nit-wit!' she snapped. 'You can't bury me out here. I want to go back to New York where there's a little life. I'm bored with you and your golf.'

'And I'm bored with you and your whole dizzy crowd.'

'At least they're alive. You're a walking corpse. Just because you were lucky enough to gamble yourself into the money, you think you're a tin god.'

'Well, I *don't* think *you're* Cleopatra! Those friends of yours . . . they trail after you because you give parties and spend money . . . *my* money.'

'Better than spending it to knock a white walnut along a mountainside!'

'Indeed? You ought to try it, Marie.' (That was her real name.) 'It might help your figure—though I doubt if anything could!'

She glared in rage and—well, that was a painful half-hour. I won't give all the details, but I was glad when the screen dissolved into meaningless coloured clouds.

'Whew!' I said, staring at van Manderpootz, who had been reading. 'You liked it?'

'Liked it! I guess I was lucky to be cleaned out. I won't regret it from now on.'

'That,' said the Professor grandly, 'is van Manderpootz's great contribution to human happiness. "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been." True no longer, my friend Dick. Vanderpootz has shown that the proper reading is "It might have been . . . worse!" '

IT WAS VERY LATE when I returned home, and as a result very late when I rose, and equally late when I got to the office. My father was unnecessarily worked up about it, but he exaggerated when he said I'd never been on time. He forgets the occasions when he's awakened me and dragged me down with him. Nor was it necessary to refer so sarcastically to my missing the *Baikal*. I reminded him of the wrecking of the liner, and he responded very heartlessly that if I'd been aboard the rocket would have been late and so would have missed colliding with the fruitship. It was likewise superfluous for him to mention that when he and I had tried to snatch a few weeks of golfing in the mountains, even the spring had been late. I had nothing to do with that.

'Dixon,' he concluded, 'You have no conception whatever of time. None whatever.'

The conversation with van Manderpootz recurred to me. I was impelled to ask, 'And have you, sir?'

'I have,' he said grimly. 'I most assuredly have. Time,' he said oracularly, 'is money.'

You can't argue with a viewpoint like that. But those aspersions of his rankled, especially that about the *Baikal*. Tardy I might be, but it was hardly conceivable that my presence aboard the rocket could have averted the catastrophe. It irritated me; in a way, it made me responsible for the deaths of those unrescued hundreds among the passengers and crew, and I didn't like the thought. Of course, if they'd waited an extra five minutes for me, or if I'd been on time and they'd left on schedule instead of five minutes late, or if . . . if . . . *if!*

If! The word called up van Manderpootz and his Subjunctivision—the worlds of 'if', the weird, unreal worlds that existed beside reality, neither past nor future, but contemporary, yet ex-temporal. Somewhere among their ghostly infinities existed one that represented the world that would have had I made the liner. I had only to call up van Manderpootz, make an appointment, and find out.

Yet it wasn't an easy decision. Suppose . . . just suppose that I found myself responsible. Not legally responsible, certainly; there'd be no question of criminal negligence or anything of that sort. Not even morally responsible; because I couldn't possibly have anticipated that my presence or absence could weigh so heavily in the scales of life and death, nor could I have known in which direction the scales would tip. Just . . . responsible, that was all. Yet I hated to find out.

I hated equally not finding out. Uncertainty has its pangs too, quite as painful as those of remorse. It might be less nerve-wracking to know myself responsible than to wonder, to waste thoughts in vain doubts and futile reproaches. So I seized the visiphone, dialled the number of the University, and at length gazed on the broad, humorous, intelligent features of van Manderpootz, dragged from a morning lecture by my call.

I WAS ALL BUT PROMPT for the appointment the following evening, and might have been actually on time but for an unreasonable traffic officer who insisted on booking me for speeding. At any rate, van Manderpootz was impressed.

'Well!' he rumbled. 'I almost missed you, Dixon. I was just going over to the club, since I didn't expect you for an hour. You're only ten minutes late.'

I ignored this. 'Professor, I want to use your . . . uh . . . Subjunctivisor.'

'Eh? Oh, yes. You're lucky then. I was just about to dismantle it.'

'Dismantle it? Why'

'It has served its purpose. It has given birth to an idea far more important than itself. I shall need the space it occupies.'

'But what *is* the idea, if it's not too presumptuous of me to ask?'

'It is not too presumptuous. You and the world which awaits it so eagerly may both know, but you hear it from the lips of the author. It is nothing less than the autobiography of van Manderpootz!' He paused impressively.

I gaped. 'Your autobiography?'

'Yes. The world, though perhaps unaware, is crying for it. I shall detail my life, my work. I shall reveal myself as the man responsible for the three years' duration of the Pacific War of 2004.'

'You?'

'None other. Had I not been a loyal Netherlands subject at that time, and therefore neutral, the forces of Asia would have been crushed in three months instead of three years. The Subjunctivisor tells me so. I would have invented a calculator to forecast the chances of every engagement—van Manderpootz would have removed the hit or miss element in the conduct of war.' He frowned solemnly. 'There is my idea. The autobiography of van Manderpootz. What do you think of it?'

I recovered my thoughts. 'It's . . . uh . . . it's colossal!' I said vehemently. 'I'll buy a copy myself. Several copies. I'll send 'em to my friends.'

'I,' said van Manderpootz expansively, 'shall autograph your copy for you. It will be priceless. I shall write in some fitting phrase, perhaps something like *Magnificus sed non superbus*—"Great but not proud!" That well describes van Manderpootz, who despite his greatness is simple, modest and unassuming. Don't you agree?'

'Perfectly! A very apt description of you. But . . . couldn't I see your Subjunctivisor before it's dismantled to make way for the greater work?'

'Ah! You wish to find out something?'

'Yes, Professor. Do you remember the *Baikal* disaster of a week or two ago? I was to have taken that liner to Moscow. I just missed it.' I related the circumstances.

'Humph!' he grunted. 'You wish to discover what would have happened had you caught it, eh? Well, I see several possibilities. Among the worlds of "if" is the one that would have been real if you had been on time, the one that depended on the vessel waiting for your actual arrival, and the one that hung on your arriving within the five minutes they actually waited. In which are you interested?'

'Oh, the last one.' That seemed the likeliest. After all, it was too much to expect that Dixon Wells could ever be on time, and as to the second possibility—well, they *hadn't* waited for me, and that, in a way, removed the weight of responsibility.

'Come on,' rumbled van Manderpootz.

I followed him across to the Physics Building and into his littered laboratory. The device still stood on the table and I took my place before it, staring at the screen of the Horsten psychomat. The clouds wavered and shifted as I sought to impress my memories on their suggestive shapes, to read into them some picture of that vanished morning. Then I had it. I made out the vista from the Staten Bridge, and was speeding across the giant span toward the airport. I waved a signal to van Manderpootz, the thing clicked, and the Subjunctivisor was on.

The grassless clay of the field appeared. It is a curious thing about the psychomat that you see not only through your own eyes but also

through the eyes of your image on the screen. It lends a strange reality to the working of the toy; I suppose a sort of self-hypnosis is partly responsible. I was rushing over the ground toward the glittering, silver-winged projectile that was the *Baikal*. A glowering officer waved me on, and I dashed up the slant of the gangplank and into the ship. The port dropped and I heaved a long 'Whew!' of relief.

'Sit down!' barked the officer, gesturing towards an unoccupied seat. I fell into it; the ship quivered under the thrust of the catapult, grated harshly into motion, and then was flung bodily into the air. The blasts roared instantly, then settled to a more muffled throbbing, and I watched Staten Island drop down and slide back beneath me. The giant rocket was under way.

'Whew!' I breathed again. 'Made it!'

I caught an amused glance from my right. I was in an aisle seat; there was no one to my left, so I turned, glanced, and froze staring.

It was a girl. Perhaps she wasn't actually as lovely as she looked to me; after all, I was seeing her through the half-visionary screen of the psychomat. I've told myself since that she *couldn't* have been as pretty as she seemed, that it was due to my own imagination filling in the details. I don't know; I remember only that I stared at curiously lovely silver-blue eyes and velvety brown hair, a small, amused mouth and an impudent nose. I kept staring until she flushed.

'I'm sorry,' I said quickly. 'I . . . was startled.'

THERE'S A FRIENDLY atmosphere aboard a trans-oceanic rocket. The passengers are forced into a crowded intimacy for anywhere from seven to twelve hours, and there isn't much room for moving about. Generally one strikes up an acquaintance with his neighbours; introductions aren't at all necessary, and the custom is simply to speak to anybody you choose—something like an all-day trip on the railroad trains of the last century, I suppose. You make friends for the duration of the journey and then, nine times out of ten, you never hear of your travelling companions again.

The girl smiled. 'Are you the individual responsible for the delay in starting?'

I admitted it. 'I seem to be chronically late. Even watches lose time as soon as I wear them.'

She laughed. 'Your responsibilities can't be very heavy.'

Well, they weren't, of course, though it's surprising how many clubs, caddies and chorus girls have depended on me at various times for appreciable portions of their incomes. But somehow I didn't feel like mentioning those things to the silvery-eyed girl.

We talked. Her name, it developed, was Joanna Caldwell, and she was going as far as Paris. She was an artist, or hoped to be one day, and of course there is no place in the world that can supply both training and inspiration like Paris. So it was there she was bound for a year of study; and despite her demurely humorous lips and laughing eyes, I could see that the business was of vast importance to her. I gathered that she had worked hard for the year in Paris, had scraped and saved for three years as fashion illustrator for some woman's magazine, though she couldn't have been many months over twenty-one. Her painting meant a great deal to her, and I could understand it. I'd felt that way about polo once.

So you see, we were sympathetic spirits from the beginning. I knew that she liked me, and it was obvious that she didn't connect Dixon Wells with the NJ Wells Corporation. As for me—well, after that first glance into her cool, silvery eyes I simply didn't care to look anywhere else. The hours seemed to drip away like minutes while I watched her.

You know how those things go. Suddenly I was calling her Joanna and she was calling me Dick, and it seemed as if we'd been doing just that all our lives. I'd decided to stop over in Paris on my way back from Moscow, and I'd secured her promise to let me see her. She was different, I tell you. She was nothing like the calculating Whimsy White, and still less like the dancing, simpering, giddy youngsters one meets at social affairs. She was just Joanna, cool and humorous yet sympathetic and serious, and as pretty as a majolica figurine.

We could scarcely realise it when the steward passed along to take orders for luncheon. Four hours out? It seemed like forty minutes. And we had a pleasant feeling of intimacy in the discovery that both of us liked lobster salad and detested oysters. It was another bond. I told her whimsically that it was an omen, nor did she object to considering it so.

Afterwards we walked along the narrow aisle to the glassed-in observation room up forward. It was almost too crowded for entry, but we didn't mind that at all as it forced us to sit very close together. We stayed long after both of us had begun to notice the stuffiness of the air.

It was just after we had returned to our seats that the catastrophe occurred. There was no warning save a sudden lurch, the result, I suppose, of the pilot's futile last-minute attempt to swerve—just that, and then a grinding crash and a terrible sensation of spinning. And after that a chorus of shrieks that were like the sounds of battle.

It *was* battle. Five hundred people were picking themselves up from the floor, were trampling each other, milling around, being cast helplessly down as the great rocket-plane, its left wing but a broken stub, circled down towards the Atlantic.

The shouts of officers sounded and a loudspeaker blared. 'Be calm,' it kept repeating, and then, 'There has been a collision. We have contacted a surface ship. There is no danger . . . There is no danger . . . '

I struggled up from the debris of shattered seats. Joanna was gone. Just as I found her crumpled between the rows, the ship struck the water with a jar that set everything crashing again. The speaker blared, 'Put on the cork belts under the seats. The lifebelts are under the seats.'

I dragged a belt loose and snapped it around Joanna, then donned one myself. The crowd was surging forward now, and the tail end of the ship began to drop. There was water behind us, sloshing in the darkness as the lights went out. An officer came sliding by, stooped, and fastened a belt about an unconscious woman ahead of us. 'You all right?' he yelled, and passed on without waiting for an answer.

The speaker must have been cut on to a battery circuit. 'And get as far away as possible,' it ordered suddenly. 'Jump from the forward port and get as far away as possible. A ship is standing by. You will be picked up. Jump from the . . . ' It went dead again.

I got Joanna untangled from the wreckage. She was pale; her silvery eyes were closed. I started dragging her slowly and painfully towards the forward port, and the slant of the floor increased until it was like the slide of a ski-jump. The officer passed again. 'Can you handle her?' he asked, and again he dashed away.

I was getting there. The crowd around the port looked smaller, or was it simply huddling closer? Then suddenly a wail of fear and despair went up, and there was a roar of water. The observation room walls had given. I saw the green surge of waves and a billowing deluge rushed down upon us. I had been late again.

That was all. I raised shocked and frightened eyes from the Subjunctivisor to face van Manderpootz, who was scribbling on the edge of the table.

I shuddered. 'Horrible!' I murmured. 'We . . . I guess we wouldn't have been among the survivors.'

'We, eh? *We*?' His eyes twinkled.

I did not enlighten him. I thanked him, bade him good-night, and went dolorously home.

EVEN MY FATHER noticed something queer about me. The day I got to the office only five minutes late, he called me in for some anxious questioning as to my health. I couldn't tell him anything, of course. How could I explain that I'd been late once too often, and had fallen in love with a girl two weeks after she was dead?

The thought drove me nearly crazy. Joanna! Joanna with her silvery eyes now lay somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic. I went around half dazed, scarcely speaking. One night I actually lacked the energy to go home and sat smoking in my father's big, over-stuffed chair in his private office until I finally dozed off. The next morning, when old NJ entered and found me there before him, he turned pale as paper, staggered and gasped, 'My heart!' It took a lot of explaining to convince him that I wasn't early at the office but just very late going home.

At last I felt I couldn't stand it. I had to do something—anything at all. I thought finally of the Subjunctivisor. I could see—yes, I could see what would have transpired if the ship hadn't been wrecked! I could trace out that weird, unreal romance hidden somewhere in the worlds of 'if'. I could, perhaps, wring a sombre, vicarious joy from the things that might have been. I could see Joanna once more!

It was late afternoon when I rushed over to van Manderpootz's quarters. He wasn't there. I encountered him finally in the hall of the Physics Building.

'Dick!' he exclaimed. 'Are you sick?'

'Sick? No, not physically, Professor, I've got to use your Subjunctivisor again. I've *got* to!'

'Eh? Oh!—that toy! You're too late, Dick. I've dismantled it. I have a better use for the space.'

I gave a miserable groan and was tempted to damn the autobiography of the great van Manderpootz. A gleam of sympathy showed in his eyes, and he took my arm, dragging me into the little office adjoining his laboratory.

'Tell me,' he commanded.

I did. I guess I made the tragedy plain enough, for his heavy brows knitted in a frown of pity.

'Not even van Manderpootz can bring back the dead,' he murmured. 'I'm sorry, Dick. Take your mind from the affair. Even were my Subjunctivisor available, I wouldn't permit you to use it. That would be but to turn the knife in the wound.' He paused. 'Find something else to occupy your mind. Do as van Manderpootz does. Find forgetfulness in work.'

'Yes,' I responded dully. 'But who'd want to read *my* autobiography? That's all right for you.'

'Autobiography? Oh! I remember. No I have abandoned that. History itself will record the life and works of van Manderpootz. Now I am engaged on a far grander project.'

'Indeed?' I was utterly, gloomily disinterested.

'Yes. Gogli has been here, Gogli the sculptor. He is to make a bust of me. What better legacy can I leave to the world than a bust of van Manderpootz, sculptured from life? Perhaps I shall present it to the city, perhaps to the University. I would have given it to the Royal Society if they had been a little more receptive, if they . . . if . . . *if*!' This last in a shout.

'Huh?'

'*If*!' cried van Manderpootz. 'What you saw in the subjunctivisor was what would have happened *if* you had caught the ship!'

'I know that.'

'But something quite different might have really happened! Don't you see? She . . . she . . . Where are those old newspapers?'

He was pawing through a pile of them. He flourished one finally. 'Here! Here are the survivors!'

Like letters of flame Joanna Caldwell's name leaped out at me. There was even a little paragraph about it, as I saw once my reeling brain permitted me to read:

> At least a score of survivors owe their lives to the bravery of twenty-eight year old Navigator Orris Hope, who patrolled both aisles during the panic, lacing lifebelts on the injured and helpless and carrying many to the port. He remained on the sinking liner until the last, finally fighting his way to the surface through the broken walls of the observation room. Amongst those who owe their lives to the young officer are Patrick Sweeaby, New York City; Mrs. Campbell Warren, Boston; Miss Joanna Caldwell, New York City—

I suppose my shout of joy was heard over in the Administration Building, blocks away. I didn't care. If van Manderpootz hadn't been armoured in stubby whiskers, I'd have kissed him. Perhaps I did anyway. I can't be sure of my actions during those chaotic minutes in the Professor's tiny office.

At last I calmed. 'I can look her up!' I gloated. 'She must have landed with the other survivors, and they were all on the British tramp freighter, the *Osgood*, that docked here last week. She must be in New York—and if she's gone over to Paris I'll find out and follow her!'

Well, it's a queer ending. She *was* in New York, but—you see, Dixon Wells had, so to speak, known Joanna Caldwell by means of the Subjunctivisor, but Joanna had never known Dixon Wells. What the ending might have been if—*if*—

But it wasn't. She had married Orris Hope, the young officer who had rescued her. I was late again.


UNIT 6

SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY




BROUGHT
NONE
HAS
TO YOU
AN ...
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HY ???
WHY? BECAUSE I HAVE NEED OF YOU. DON'T WORRY, ALL WILL BE EXPLAINED IN DUE COURSE.!
BUT WHO ARE YOU WHAT ARE YOU??
AS I SAID, I AM INCUBUS. I AM A VISITOR. I VISIT DREAMS AND ILLUSIONS. I AM EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE. EVERYTHING THAT YOU SEE HERE, I CREATED FOR YOUR BENEFIT!
I THOUGHT THESE THINGS WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL MORE AT HOME. I FOUND THEM IN YOUR HEADS!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND!
YES!
THESE FIGURES ARE FAMILIAR TO YOU?
THEN THAT IS WHY THEY EXIST HERE! I CAN CREATE ANYTHING YOU'VE EVER THOUGHT OF BECAUSE I CREATED THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE!
YOU SEE, YOU'RE IN A PLACE THAT DOESN'T REALLY EXIST. WHAT YOU HAVE JUST SEEN IS ONLY ONE PLACE. THERE ARE MANY OTHERS, PEOPLED WITH BEINGS NEITHER DEAD NOR ALIVE, BEYOND THE COMPREHENSION OF A HUMAN MIND. IF YOU CAN THINK OF IT, THEN I CAN REPRODUCE IT !!
IT'S ... JUST.. JUST A.. TRICK!
A TRICK? YES! A TRICK! AN ILLUSION. I CREATE ILLUSIONS. BUT THEN, WHERE DOES ILLUSION START AND REALITY STOP ?
YOUR REALITY THAT IS! I HAVE NONE. TO ME NOTHING IS REAL! BUT YOU STILL LOOK PUZZLED. I SUPPOSE IT IS DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND. PERHAPS A DEMONSTRATION IS NEEDED TO CONVINCE YOU OF WHAT I AM, AND WHAT I CAN DO. REMEMBER I AM INCUBUS!
ANY DARK THOUGHTS OR IMAGININGS THAT YOU HAVE HAD WERE THERE BECAUSE I PUT THEM THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE.
..OR HERE?
OH THIS IS SO TIRESOME. I GET TIRED OF PLAYING THESE GAMES. THAT'S ALL I EVER SEEM TO DO.. PLAY TIRESOME GAMES. I'M BORED! TIME FOR MORE SERIOUS MATTERS. EITHER YOU BELIEVE ME OR YOU WANT MORE PROOF!
ESCAPE DIXIE!! SOMEHOW THERE MUST BE A WAY!
BUT YOU HEARD WHAT HE SAID .. YOU SAW .. !
DIXIE, WE'RE NOT HANGING AROUND TO PROVIDE FUN AND GAMES FOR THAT COSMIC PIXIE!
ZZT-PP!
HANGING AROUND.. A MOST APT PHRASE MY DEAR NOVA! A LITTLE REMINDER TO HELP YOU TO REMEMBER WHO'S IN CONTROL!
NEXT SECOND
IS THIS CLIFF HANGER THE END OF NICK AND DIXIE? HANG AROUND TILL NEXT MONYTH AND FIND OUT!


SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY



Seeing that I've been mentioned twice in *SFM* over the last three months (in connection with the original anthology piece and the one on Mike Moorcock), which is certainly doing me a great honour in view of my limited sf output, may I take the liberty of pointing out a few omissions and mistakes in Ashley's piece on Mike. I've known Moorcock for over twelve years now and he might be too modest in pointing them out.

The list of uncollected stories is incomplete, missing as it does three of Moorcock's most important stories:

Two latter-day Cornelius tales, *The Longford Cup* (which appeared in *Penthouse*) and another (I'm afraid I can't recall the title) which appeared in *Corridor* and will, I understand, appear as a different version in the final volume of Ellison's *Dangerous Visions;* but most important of all, *A Dead Singer* (it appeared in a Giles Gordon/Alex Hamilton anthology, *Factions,* published by Michael Joseph 1974) which marks Moorcock's first appearance in mainstream literature, with a fascinating story where the dead Jimi Hendrix steals the scene . . .

Also, under **7** *Apocalypse* . . . is not a new story but an excerpt from 32 *Breakfast in the Ruins.*

There is no French comic devoted to Elric stories, just a one-shot booklet by Philippe Druillet and Michel Demuth (published here by Bill Butler) which barely covers one story and is far from faithful to Moorcock's series. The first two pages of this strip appeared in the defunct French monthly *Moi Aussi,* which I edited, scripted by myself and following Mike's story somewhat more precisely.

Maxim Jakubowski (Favell Green, Northampton)

Gene Cochran's article *Science Fiction in Rock Music (SFM Vol 1 No 8)* implied that all sf rock is directly descended from the early Pink Floyd albums. However, I think it is only fair that alternate theories be examined.

Take first Paul Kantner and Jefferson Starship who were dealt with in about half a line. Different members of the Starship have proved beyond a doubt their intimate contact with the field of sf. The Airplane's first album featured a track concerning a couple making love in space. The words to the title track of their fourth album *Crown of Creation* are taken directly from Wyndham's novel *The Chrysalids.* Also on the same album is a song written by Dave Crosby called *Triad* which is based on Heinlein's concept of water-brotherhood. The Starship album *Blows Against the Empire* is almost totally based on Heinlein's *Methuselah's Children.* The album concerns a group of people attempting to escape from America. They plan to hijack a starship that is being constructed in orbit. Kantner acknowledges his debt to Heinlein by including a line from the novel in his album.

Airplane and Heinlein make strange bedfellows when one considers Heinlein's reputation as a militarist and Airplane's commitment to the extreme left. However, be that as it may, I feel that another article examining the connections of rock music with sf would be well worth while.

Marc A Ortlieb (Naracoorte, Australia)

I would like to call your attention to an error in *SFM Vol 2 No 1;* the News page stated that Leonard Nimoy would not be in the new *Star Trek* film. I checked immediately with the President of the Star Trek Action Group, members of the Leonard Nimoy Association of Fans and William Shatner Enterprises. They all agreed that Leonard would be in the film and that there had never been any talk of him not being in it.

H J Hibbert (Matlock, Derbyshire)

Ed: *Must have been a nasty rumour. Sorry.*

In a recent letter *(SFM Vol 2 No 1)* reader K J Ward stated that Anne McCaffrey offers no explanation of how the 'threads', the menace in her novel *Dragonquest,* are able to cross interplanetary space. In fact an explanation is given, albeit cryptically, in the other story of the dragon riders, *Dragonflight.*

In this novel the words 'Arrhenius? Eureka! Mycorrhiza' are found engraved on a metal plate. 'Mycorrhiza' describes how the 'threads' attack the wildlife of Pern; it means the symbiosis of a plant and a fungus. 'Arrhenius' was a Swedish chemist who proposed that micro-organisms could be transferred from one planet to another by the pressure of sunlight, an eminently suitable means of propagation for the 'threads'.

Andrew Hull (Crawley, Sussex)

Conducted by THOMAS SHERIDAN

READERS' questions on any aspect of science fiction are dealt with in this regular feature by THOMAS SHERIDAN, who is internationally known as one of the foremost experts on the medium. Address your questions to THE QUERY BOX, *Science Fiction Monthly,* New English Library Ltd, Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London EC1N 2JR. They will be answered as quickly as possible.

THE QUERY BOX

JUVENILE GENIUS
What can you tell me about Lu Senarens, whose stories were published in a 'penny dreadful' round about 1900? I would like to get hold of some of them.
Tony Briscoe, Colindale, London.

Luis Philip Senarens was responsible for the bulk of the prophetic dime novels which were popular in America towards the end of the last century and paved the way for the science fiction pulps. Writing as 'Noname', he penned the stories about Frank Reade Jnr, the boy inventor who used both steam and electricity to power his armoured vehicles, submersible boats, aircraft and robots. Son of an earlier teenage genius who built a *Steam Man of the Prairies* in 1868, Frank employed his fantastic machines to explore in strange lands and the ocean deeps, bore his way through the Earth, and even venture into outer space.

The *Frank Reade Library*, which featured such titles as *White Cruiser of the Clouds*, or *The Search for the Dog-Faced Men*, published 191 issues between 1892 and 1898, appearing weekly, price five cents, for most of that time. Copies are now precious collector's items; so are specimens of the Aldine *Invention, Travel and Adventure Library*, which presented Frank's exploits in this country. Crudely written, they are interesting today mostly for their illustrations.

Like his brain-child, Lu started young. He was selling his stories at 14 and during his most active period earned $150 a week—big money in those days. Employing twenty-seven pen-names, he totted up sixty million words and was known as 'the American Jules Verne'. In 1902 he became editor of the Frank Tousey publications to which he contributed, and later produced his own *Moving Picture Stories*, having turned to writing film scenarios. He died in Brooklyn in 1939 at the age of 74.

CHANGELING
Can you give me any information on *Una* by John Wyndham?
Joseph M Rodgers, Blackley, Manchester.

You refer to *Una* as a 'book', but we know of no book with that title—unless it's another American collection which has escaped our notice. It is actually a short story which appears in *Jizzle*, published by Dobson in 1954 (Four Square pb 1962), and in the similar but not identical American collection, *Tales of Gooseflesh and Laughter* (Ballantine 1956).

It is also included in *The Best of John Wyndham* (Sidgwick; Sphere pb 1973) under the title *The Perfect Creature*—and dated as though it was written in 1937, which it was, but not in any form. The story which appeared in the first issue of *Tales of Wonder* by-lined John Beynon is not, in fact, the same story as the *Perfect Creature* which appeared in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* for January 1953 by-lined John Wyndham and was later retitled *Una:* nearly, but not quite.

Though it has the same characters and many other resemblances, the John Wyndham story was completely rewritten and given a different ending by the author who had changed his own pen-name two or three years before. And in the process the still imperfect creature, at first called 'Number One', went through a sex-change to become 'Una'.

EUREKA!
Some years ago I was given *New Worlds 11* and read a story titled *Stand the Wall.* It was superbly written and exciting reading. Could you name the author and any books he has written since?
K Robson, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham.

This is the sort of query that puts us on our mettle. You have confused *New Worlds* with *New Writings in SF*, the eleventh (Corgi 1967) number of which featured *The Wall to End the World*. The title refers to an ancient fortification whose guardians use the salutation *'Stand the Wall!'* ! The author is Vincent King, who revived the tyrannical Teachers in his novel *Candy Man* (Gollancz 1971; Sphere pb 1973), in which a degenerate race is at the mercy of the machines and their only hope is escape to the stars. It's chock-full of symbolism . .

An earlier King novel, *Light a Last Candle* (Rapp & Whiting 1970), is also set in a bleak future in which the outcast Free Men are striving to overthrow the Aliens who have enslaved the rest of humanity.

THINGS IN STORE
Could you tell me the title of a book by Brian Aldiss which dealt with mass sterility among humans; also of one about the consumer society of the future, by Frederik Pohl or Poul Anderson?
AM Hodgson, Spital Tongues, Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Aldiss title is *Greybeard*, which depicts a future world made sterile by atomic testing—until a Second Generation of mutants emerge. First published by Faber in 1964, it was paperbacked by Panther in 1968.

The other title is *The Space Merchants*, by Frederik Pohl and CM Kornbluth, the classic satire which tells of an overcrowded world dominated by giant corporations and advertising agencies fighting over international markets, and of a scheme to colonise Venus. First published here by Heinemann in 1955, it was paperbacked by Digit before being issued by Penguin in 1968 and republished by Gollancz in 1972. It was serialised by *Galaxy* in 1952 under the title, *Gravy Planet.*

STRONG MAN
Tell me, if you can, who thought up the idea for the TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man.*
James Reeves, Petworth, West Sussex.

The series starring Lee Majors was based on the novel *Cyborg*, by Martin Caidin, which is now available as a Mayflower paperback. The other questions you raise as to how the wrecked astronaut, reconstructed with the aid of bionics, could perform such herculean feats of strength are best answered by the author, who is a noted science writer. One of his earlier novels, *Marooned* (Hodder 1964), was made into the film of that title.

SMITH'S CRISPEST
Are there any books by EE 'Doc' Smith in the pipeline, or already on the market, other than the *Skylark* and *Lensman* series?
Ross G Sumner, Orpington, Kent.

Subspace Explorers, which appeared in the USA in 1965, has now been published here as a Panther paperback. A collection of his best short stories, which will include some of his more recent work, is due to be published here shortly.

'He stood up slowly and stepped backwards through the doorway of the pub. Action stations! He crouched at the window with the binoculars and for an instant he saw it. Small, round, hard, but with blurred edges, no solid outline. Skittering around like a land-crab among the stunted bushes on the roadside. Two or three fine jointed arms . . . antennae would you call them?'

WAY OUT WEST

by Cherry Wilder

'Deploy your sensors. Transmit on the ascending arc and on the descending arc. What are your colour readings, dear creature?'

'Blue. Through the descending arc blue, through the ascending arc brown. Red-brown bisected by a black line.'

'Reverse yourself, you fool! You're upside down.'

'Upside down in relation to which points, dear Maker?'

'Upside down in relation to the planet's surface.'

'You mean the planet is red-brown.'

'In this particular region, yes. Are your sensors deployed?'

'Now reversed and re-deployed. A vast expanse of red-brown bisected by a black line. A shadow in the upper right quadrant.'

'Stay alert. Be prepared to reduce size. Remain parallel to the black line and approach the shadow while I take readings.'

'Maker, there is a loose mass of cellulose ahead. Shall I reduce size?'

'No, it's probably a plant. Circumvent.'

'But it's alive?'

'Not especially sentient, my dear Loy. Don't be afraid. Place it between you and the shadow.'

'The shadow has developed lines of rigidity. There's a distinct thermal aura rising from the black line, which now appears to be of considerable width. About twelve tens wide and distinguished, as I reported, by these tall heat waves.'

'Describe the shadow as its detail emerges.'

'A cluster of containers. Based on square and rectangular forms but deviating. Roughly triangular patterns in the superstructures.

'Come Loy . . . you know what it is!'

'No, truly. It looks like a piece of abstract art . . . a large piece for a display. The colours are particularly interesting. There's a metallic pillar in the foreground of blinding yellow, a colour I must attempt to copy. The containers have silicon plates let into them . . . randomly distributed. The shadows throughout the cluster are black as space. There are black holes cut in the container walls and the shadows reach in and out.'

'Now do you think we should have tried the other site?'

'Maker, Maker . . . have we found it? Oh it's beautiful! Where are the specimens?'

'Patience, dear Loy. Hold your position and extend your sensors.'

'Something is coming. Moving fast along the black line . . . I know what this is, Maker. I wonder if you can guess? It gives off strong mixed odours, moves on rubber wheels, is at least three tens long and has a metallic forward hatch.'

'A transport . . . very good, Loy.'

'Transporting something with a stronger odour than most of our specimens. It's coming very close . . . '

'Hold your ground. It won't deviate from the black line.'

'It has gone past. Oh, Maker . . . '

'What is it, Loy?'

'Something else. Coming out of a container. Oh, it's indescribable.'

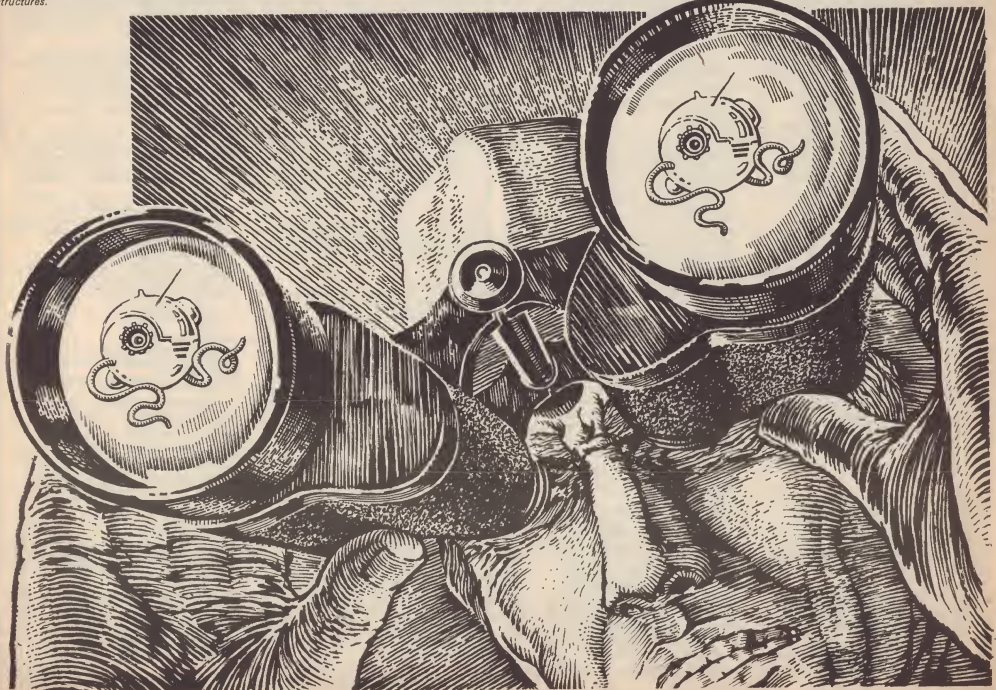
'Try to report. Hold your position.'

'Less than one ten in height. Four articulate projections from a roughly rectangular central area. A nodule on the upper edge between two of the projections. Can this be what we want? It's like nothing I've ever seen . . . or perhaps it's just a little like the Interpreter. The motion has to be seen to be believed. A sort of loose, jerky movement in contact with the surface. Throwing up little dust clouds, in fact. Is this what we're after?'

'Yes, Loy. I'm proud of you. That is undoubtedly Homo Sapiens.'

Old Man Ryan eased himself out of his shanty into the sunlight. He walked across to the store, sat down on the step, tipped back his old felt hat a little, and had his look round. Big load of beef just gone through to Cobar. He took a long squinting look eastwards along the highway; nothing coming. There was a dust cloud to the west about half a mile; that would be Hughie Fraser's new manager from Glengarry going to check on his bore. He takes the turning—yes, there he goes. The dust cloud moved out of sight over the red dirt into acres of scruffy tussock. Old Man Ryan, peering through sandy lashes, did a spot check on the amount of green between himself and the horizon. Not bad for the time of year. Twenty miles out it was starting to turn blue round the edges. No doubt about it, the world was round. Windmill at the Johnson's corner post, you'd swear it was walking away downhill.

The pattern of creases altered round his eyes as he shifted focus to take in the foreground. Heatwaves coming up off the bitumen; back east about fifty yards there was the beginnings of a good mirage. Dip in the road and by ten o'clock it looked like it was full of water, great puddle of water spreading across the highway. Something over there behind the saltbush, forty feet from the old oil-drum. Hub-cap? Bit of movement. Wouldn't be another goanna? Old Man Ryan became still as a lizard himself and looked in another direction.



IAN HENDERSON

'It has no sensory reaction to my presence, Maker.'

'Report on the specimen, Loy.'

'It came out of one container, moved to another, folded itself and settled on a low shelf outside one of the dark holes or hatchways.'

'Are there any obvious inscriptions on the containers? I'll have the Interpreter work on them.'

'There is one close to me on this side of the black line. Black symbols on a strip of non-metallic substance . . . wood. A wooden crosspiece on a pillar of the same substance. The symbols are as follows:

BARNEY'S BLUFF
Pop 15
When the bear's on

'I have that recorded. The Interpreter insists that it is somehow reversed.'

'It's not my fault this time Maker, I swear. Here . . . I'll reverse my sensor.'

'He can make it out now. The two larger groups of symbols are apparently the name of this container cluster.'

'Does the name have any meaning?'

'The Interpreter believes the group BLUFF has reference to a hill or rocky outcrop.'

'There is nothing of that sort in the vicinity, Maker.'

'He's very unreliable, I'm afraid. As for the rest of the inscription it's a conditional statement. Fifteen . . . '

'I understand the number, Maker . . . '

'Of course you do, Loy. Fifteen of the species inhabit the cluster according to the presence or absence of a type of beverage. Any further inscriptions?'

'A metallic plate on the central container where the specimen is at present located. I'll transmit: BILLY TEA.'

'It's unclear.'

'I have problems with halation.'

'The Interpreter claims that the first group is a personal name. The second group has to do with another type of beverage. They drink a lot.'

'The region is very arid, Maker. There's an artesian water course behind the cluster. We might call this an oasis. Are we making a move?'

'I'd like to ascertain their numbers.'

'Fifteen, Maker, fifteen; didn't you say fifteen?'

'Ah, but that is conditional, *Loy. How are we to determine if "beer is on"?'*

'By counting the inhabitants, surely?'

'I'm afraid your thinking is too circular. We will begin an attractive entrapment.'

'Wait, Maker. The specimen has moved to the largest of the three containers. It has an inscription repeated on its silicon inserts: BAR BAR.'

'BARBAR or simply BAR?'

'Unclear, Maker.'

'Never mind, the Interpreter has grasped it. The group has any number of possible meanings but the relevant one is surely "a place where drinks are served". Do you think the specimen has joined fourteen others? Are they preparing to imbibe?'

'Impossible to tell, Maker. The situation is bristling with conditions. Will I start an enticement? The lights and shadows? The fountain?'

'Loy, Loy, you're too impatient. I will try to get some hints from this brute of an Interpreter and we will evolve a programme.'

Old Man Ryan wandered over to the pub to have a squiz at the tourists. He walked in shadow all the way to the veranda. Probably wasn't a goanna. More like a roll of barbed wire. Something making a little rainbow light on the side of the saltbush. Wasn't bloody water, that's for sure. Drop of oil? Stare long enough in this heat and you start seeing things. He plunged into the cool depths of the bar then swung back and peered across the road. Not a flicker.

The big room was roughly built but all its edges had been rubbed smooth. There was a smell of beer deep in the wood, a tang of fly-spray and a whiff of the disinfectant Bet was using on her cloth as she wiped down the long, long bar. She had the fan going for the visitors: there they sat, the pair of them, with their hair hanging down.

'Morning all . . . ' rumbled the old man. 'Bet . . . could you let me have that pair of binoculars Ern keeps on top of the cupboard.'

'What, love?' asked Bet. 'The field glasses? Ern hasn't used them since he flew down to see the Cup.'

She reached down the leather case and the old man stepped back on to the veranda. As he focused the glasses he heard the girl laugh, cheeky possum, and say to Bet, 'Reckon you'll get them back?'

Then the boy chimed in. 'Is that old bloke a swaggie, you know, a real sundowner?'

Bet laughed. 'Don't let the old clothes fool you Mick,' she said. 'That's Old Man Ryan.'

'He owns the store?' the boy was surprised.

'And this pub,' said Bet, 'and everything else around here. This is Barney's Bluff and he's Barney.'

All this time Old Man Ryan was trying to draw a bead on the saltbush and having no luck. A strange Landrover went roaring through towards the west and raised a dust cloud from the shoulder of the road. He gave it away and went inside to have a beer.

'Thought I was on to a goanna,' he said.

'Want me to open up the store, Barney?' asked Bet. 'Ern took the order over to the Johnsons'.'

'No need,' said the old man. 'They'll honk if they want anything.'

He called to the boy at the far end of the bar. 'Getting your bike fixed, son?'

'Part gets here tomorrow,' he said cheerfully. 'Coming in the mail truck.'

The old man sipped his beer and observed the visitors discreetly. Beads. Beads and bits of mirror decorating the girl's blouse and the young feller's vest. Both in faded dungarees with fly fronts. Still he'd rather watch them than a mob of drunken shearers. All things bright and beautiful—her hair was gold and his was brown. She didn't have a stitch on under that cotton blouse. Tsk. If someone dropped in and the word got around the people would come for miles to see a couple of tourists like this. Might have twenty people in that night but it didn't matter—there was a delivery tomorrow.



The girl was restless; she moved around the empty room touching the stacked chairs and looking into the photos on the wall. Then she stood at the door, hanging outside on to the veranda.

'Something over the road I' she said.

'Thought I saw a goanna,' said the old man.

'No,' said the girl. 'It's yellow. Glowing yellow.'

'Yellow beer can, Jen,' teased the boy.

'One of them yellow-bellied snakes,' the old man winked at Bet and the boy.

'No . . . truly . . . it's marvellous!' the girl turned to Bet. 'Look, Mrs Miller . . . '

She slipped outside; Bet put down her cloth and went after her. Barney and the boy heard Bet say in an odd, sweet voice, 'Like a flower . . . '

'Maker! I have two! Prepare to enfold . . . '

'I am prepared, Loy. Withdraw from contact zone.'

The boy, Mick, uttered a hoarse scream and sprang to the door.

'What the . . . ?'

Barney Ryan came up behind him and they stared out into the harsh light. The old man's nerves were good but these days he was always testing his senses in case he missed something. What the hell was it? Hadn't heard a car, a scream; all he could see was the pain and fear on the kid's face. There was nothing across the road. No sign of Bet or the girl. Only the endless plain stretching to the horizon, blurred with heat. Nothing. The same pointless scatter of objects on the roadside—oil-drum, saltbush, nothing there, couple of boards further east in line with the signpost. Where were the girls then? Nothing coming or going, the sky empty, nothing within cooee. Mick gave a loud cry 'Jenny! Jenny!'

He ran across the road, flinging up his arms as he plunged out into the hot light of day. The scraps of mirror glass worked on to his vest glittered in the sunlight.

'Jenny!'

The boy ran directly to some particular spot in the emptiness and stood rigid, staring upwards. Then Old Man Ryan saw what he had seen.

Mick was standing on a disc of light. The old man looked up, knowing there was nothing up there except the sun. But the sun's radiance had slipped and spread: there was something else up there so bright that it blinded you like the sun. The disc where the boy stood was a funnel, a tube of light, whirling in its innards like a willy-willy. For a few heartbeats he saw the boy whirled up, a moving darkness inside the tube, then it was over. Old Man Ryan was alone, weak-kneed, on the veranda of his pub, with black patches dancing in front of his eyes from staring towards the sun.

'Three, Maker. Another one in view.'

'All enfolded in good condition, Loy.'

'The fourth is hesitating, Maker. Enticement may not be necessary. Curiosity is inbuilt in certain species.'

'Got the bloody lot!' said Old Man Ryan.

He squatted down on the veranda, still looking at the place where the boy disappeared. He was silly with it, he knew that. He was dead. He was drunk. He was sound asleep and having a dream. He had a strong impulse to do what the boy had done, to go out and stand there and get sucked in. It would be a damn sight easier than trying to explain. What in the name of Jesus could he say to Ern Miller when he came home? Sorry mate, a flying saucer got Bet.

Then, out of the corner of his eye he caught a flicker of movement. He balanced on the tips of his fingers and tried to get a look without turning his head. There I Little bastard of a barbed-wire hub-cap—been out there all the time keeping an eye on them. Dream or not he'd give it a run for its money. He stood up slowly and stepped backwards through the doorway of the pub. Action stations! He crouched at the window with the binoculars and for an instant he saw it. Small, round, hard, but with blurred edges, no solid outline. Skittering like a land crab among the stunted bushes on the roadside. Two or three fine jointed arms—antennae would you call them?

It moved and Barney lost it. Took its colouring from the ground, he reckoned, like a chameleon. He kept on watching and a globule of yellow light appeared. He lowered the glasses, remembering Bet and the girl. The glow of yellow assumed a more definite shape—it *was* like a flower—growing and glowing in the very spot where the boy had been taken. That was the trick, Barney realised: you walked out to have a look and zam! kapow! Well for a start he wouldn't go out. It could glow like a flaming Wurlitzer and he wouldn't go out. Or maybe he could try something a bit different.

'Maker, Maker, a fourth on the way.'

'Prepare to enfold, Loy . . . withdraw from contact zone.'

'Abort! Abort! Maker . . . '

'You foolish thing! What went wrong? The enfolding was wasted! Do you think we like clogging our filters with detritus from the surface of this planet?'

'Maker, it approached the very edge of the zone . . . '

'And then?'

'It threw an object at my enticement light and moved out of range.'

'What object? A missile? Did you intercept?'

'Of course, Maker. It's a silicon container with an insert of fibrous material covered with an inscription. Shall I transmit?'

'Where is the specimen, Loy?'

'It moved into the central container, Maker. I have a feeling of being watched.'

'Your sensors are not as reliable as I had hoped. Replace the container in the contact zone and I shall waste another enfolding upon this artefact.'

Barney stood inside the store, panting from his exertions and watching like a hawk. The bloody thing had caught the bottle on the fly and skipped out of the way before the tube of light came down. Now it was *bringing the bottle back*. He had a good line of fire but no, he'd wait until they got the message. Now—it gets out of range and there she goes again, taking up the bloody bottle this time. Get a move on. He went for the 303.22, rooted for the cartridges behind the baked beans and was back at the window in less than a minute, looking for the little bugger and loading his gun.

'Loy?'

'Maker ?'
'Any change ?'
'No, Maker. What was the inscription inside the artefact ?'
'It was a threat, Loy. A threat against you, little one.'
'Maker, Maker, you know I fear nothing but your displeasure. Tell me, show me.'
'The original transmits as follows. And notice that none of my instruments are reversed:'

SEND BACK THOSE PERSONS UNHARMED OR I WILL ZAP YOUR LITTLE SCOUT WITH MY MAGIC ELECTRIC RADIO DEATH RAY B RYAN'

'What does the Interpreter say ? Maker, you're tormenting me . . . '
'It translates roughly as follows, little scout. The specimen wants its companions returned unharmed or else it will destroy you with a multi-powered weapon.'
'Maker, this is impossible ! It has no such weapons . . . '
'How do you know ? Our reading showed an electric generator. And it's certainly very bold. Not many life forms attempt to communicate, let alone threaten us . . . '
'Maker, only a primitive would expect us to know its language.'
'Perhaps. But we do this language, or more properly, we have an Interpreter, such as he is. Reduce size and take evasive action.'
*'Maker, does this mean you're taking the threat seriously ? Bflmpztrk1** !'*
'Loy ? Report ! Are you under attack ?'
'A missile. Small piece of shaped metal driven by an explosive charge. It took me unawares.'
'Check your instruments.'
'I know the extent of the damage. My interceptor is slightly chipped and the fragment has obscured one quadrant of my communication centre. I have switched channels.'
'Damage from a simple metal missile . . . Loy, this is frightful incompetence !'
'Maker, please ! It was so much faster than the first missile . . . the silicon container . . . that my interceptor was unprepared.'
'Loy, this creature is fierce. You must flush it out of the container.'
'Maker . . . you're placing me in jeopardy !'
'Nonsense. Advance across the black line and try your echo oscillator.'
'I can't, I can't. It's coming out with a small metallic container, a black box and a series of metallic rods. Maker, it's coming to destroy me with a multi-powered weapon !'

Barney Ryan stepped out gingerly holding the canister, the gun, the length of conduit and his cassette recorder. He walked out in the shadow of the petrol bowser and kicked at the big stand-up sign from the petrol company. He'd winged the scout and it might be miles away by now, but he reckoned it was time for him to make a move. He slung the gun across his back, opened the canister and played out eighty feet of yellow sump fuse. He fastened it to the length of conduit and stood watching. He didn't want to cross the highway until he had cover. He began to play the recorder with the volume turned up as hard as it would go and he hurled the conduit across the highway like a javelin, with the fuse snaking out lumpily behind it. There were a few bars of introduction, then as Bing Crosby started into *White Christmas* in a voice of thunder, Barney raced into the roadway and lit the fuse. The smoke came up in a swirling, sulphurous cloud ; he heaved up the signboard and ran sideways across the road behind his shield.

'Maker, I'm under attack ! Retire me !'
'Report Loy ! Report you foolish creature !'
'Clouds of dense smoke on the black line. A hideous noise. A frightful sulphurous smell. I've lost contact with the specimen.'
'Go west. Reduce size. If you locate the specimen you have my permission to fire tranquillising darts.'
*'Bflmpztrqq ⊢** !'*
'Not again !'
'No damage, Maker ! Those missiles cannot penetrate my armour but they jolt a little.'
'Loy, that primitive creature shouldn't even be able to see you !'
'It has erected some sort of fortification west of the contact zone. A screen of wood and metal.'
'Loy, tranquillise that specimen ! That's an imperative !'

Old Man Ryan heard a light thunk on the signboard in front of him, then a spattering, thunk, thunk, thunk. Little bugger was tough, no doubt about it, but he'd seen it and hit it. Now it was firing at him with little fairy bullets. Or maybe it had a magic, electric radio death-ray. Back in front of the store the fuse had burned out and old Bing was bellowing *Don't Fence Me In*. Barney wondered if the scout had seen many Westerns. He took off his old felt hat, put it on a bit of stick and leaned it against the edge of the shield. Thunk, thunk, in ten seconds the hat was full of the bloody things : like little slivers of glass, God knows what effect they'd have on a bloke.

The hat began to slide artistically down the edge of the signboard. Barney fired a shot in the air and nipped into the cover of the old oil-drum ten feet to his right. Then he saw the thing again and he knew he had it cornered, if only he could muster the strength. The scout had grown a bit bigger and now it was a dull silver, which he thought might be its normal colour. It skipped up towards the signboard and he could tell that the poor, stupid thing was pleased, because it was still convinced that he was inside the hat. Barney lined it up and gently lifted the piece of corrugated iron covering the forty-gallon drum ; he gripped the upper edge and pulled it towards him, feeling the contents move. Still one quarter full, and to think he'd been on to Ern to move it away, out of sight. Could he do it ?

'Maker, Maker . . . the specimen is tranquillised.'
'Good work, Loy. Is it in the open ! Can you see its entire body ?'
'No Maker, it's behind the shield. I'm about to evaluate . . . '
'Loy ! Take care . . . '
'Blmplmplmpl . . . '
'Loy ! Loy !'

Barney collapsed on the underside of the oil drum with his heart pounding, Tar oozed stickily from the edges of the drum, planted firmly in the red soil. He brought his ear close to the side of the drum but he couldn't hear anything. Over the road the Old Groaner swung into *Dear Hearts and Gentle People*. The old man strode impatiently back across the highway and switched off the recorder.

'Loy ? Dear creature, can't you communicate ?'
'Maker . . . '
'Your signal is very faint. Deploy your sensors.'
'Sensors obscured.'
'Loy ! What has this creature done to you ?'
'Obscured. Buried by metal container holding viscous liquid . . . carbon distillate . . . formula . . . formula . . . '
'Drat the formula . . . Loy, my poor foolish one, can you give me a location to enfold you ?'
'No, Maker . . . Abandon . . . '
'Signal very faint.'
'Abandon me, Maker . . . unworthy . . . all quadrants obliterating . . . '
'I must take the necessary steps before your mechanism is entirely ruined.'

Old Man Ryan stood waiting in the heat, missing his hat a little. Presently the disc glowed and the tube appeared with whirling shadows in its depths. There they all were, safe and sound ; Bet Miller in her print dress and the two visitors. No one had harmed a hair of their heads. They stayed in a trance after the disc faded and for the first time Barney heard a faint twanging sound in the air, far overhead.

He raced over to them and saw that the boy had the bottle, the same bottle, in his hand ; Bet was clutching a small box of dull metal. Barney spoke to them but they were out to it, like sleepwalkers. He was on the watch for tricks but finally he took the bottle and drew out his own note, on a piece of lined paper from Bet's order book, with a fresh message on the back :

YOUR TERMS ACCEPTED. PLACE LOCATOR BOX CLOSE TO IMPRISONED SCOUT. COMPANIONS WILL DETRANQUILLISE IN ONE HOUR EARTH TIME.

Then in smaller block letters—the handwriting was a lot like his own—there was a note :

STAY INSIDE BAR BAR HE MAY CHANGE HIS MIND
IMFRIM-NAR—INTERPRETER

And last of all, a handprint.

Barney didn't waste any time ; he took the box from Bet and put it on top of the oil drum. Then he shepherded them all back into the pub, quick smart, and sat them down to detranquillise. He hadn't a clue what he would say to them when they woke up—or vice-versa. Outside, the noonday sun burned down and, as Barney watched, the disc of light appeared, centred on the oil drum. When the tube whirled it took up everything for yards around : the drum, the tar, the little scout, the signboard—Jesus, where would he say that had gone ?—and Barney's hat, stuck with little glass darts.

He was left all by himself, for the moment, starting another cold beer in the pub he won from Old Man Fraser, years ago, in a poker game. He didn't have any cards in his hand, as it happened he was bluffing, so that was how the milk got in the coconut—the fellers called the place Barney's Bluff. While he was thinking of hands he took out the note again and puzzled over it. No doubt about it, one of the biggest mysteries was that Interpreter. Barney was very grateful for the advice. He couldn't help wondering where the outfit picked up the poor bastard, how he came to understand English, and how he came to have seven fingers on his hand.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

A few of the stories deserve particular attention. John Baxter's own Beach *is an attempt at a truly Australian sf story. Evocatively and economically, Baxter presents a kind of post-disaster situation in which the inhabitants of an unnamed city (probably Sydney) have all retreated to the beach, where they endure a twilight existence. The hero, however, is still human enough to retain his curiosity, and leaves his habitual beach environment to explore the empty houses beyond. We are not told what has happened, and it doesn't matter. As a statement about the relationship of Australians with aspects of their environment, the story has great power. On the evidence of this and other stories, Baxter could have matured into one of the best Australian sf writers. Now he seems to have permanently switched to film criticism* (eg Science Fiction in the Cinema *and* Stunt), *which is a great pity.*

Jack Wodhams was another highly promising talent who hasn't been much heard from in recent years. His novella There is a Crooked Man *is an extremely skilful juggling trick, in which Wodhams tries to keep at least fifteen separate stories going throughout, and succeeds triumphantly. They are connected only in that they all concern crime and the bizarre forms it might take in the future. Although Wodhams' writing ability flags behind his ambitions, the power of invention and unusual angle of vision displayed in this story confirm Baxter's assessment of him as 'the most promising talent to emerge from Australian science fiction in its history'. Jack Wodhams, where are you ?*

Lee Harding's The Evidence *is too overtly allegorical for my liking, and probably had more impact back in the 'Sixties when the shadow of the Bomb loomed larger than it does now. But what is interesting about these stories is that they try to break new ground—or at least to treat an old subject in a new way—and as such are representative of a newer sf tradition. The same is true of some of the other stories, such as Kit Denton's* Burning Spear *about a boy who can pick up sunlight, which admittedly is fantasy rather than sf.*

But there are several examples of the older type of sf, such as Martin Loran's An Ounce of Dissension, *and Frank Bryning's* For Men Must Work. *Ron Smith's* Strong Attraction, *however, is superlative. It places one of the basic human emotions, jealousy, in an entirely new context. The colonists on an alien planet find that their wives are so strongly attracted to the scaly, snake-like humanoid natives because of their smell, that they're prepared to leave their husbands for them. This is a very interesting example of how some of the ingredients of traditional sf can be used in a new way.*

The scope of the second anthology is somewhat wider. Baxter includes two poems, one by Douglas Stewart, one of Australia's most distinguished poets, and a story which doesn't even pretend to be sf, Vale, Pollini ! *by the late George Johnston. I feel that both choices are justified, the extract from Stewart's* Rutherford *for what it says of scientific creativity, and the Johnston story because, as Baxter says, it 'embodies a special attitude to reality' which the best sf exhibits. On the other hand, two of the stories—those by Olaf Ruhen and David Rome—are contemporary stories masquerading as sf. This volume is of a slightly lower standard than the first, and there's a lack of balance derived from the inclusion of the long story* The Case of the Perjured Planet *by Martin Loran, which takes up a third of the book.*

There are still some very good things here. Johnston's story is the best in the book, but Steve Kaldor's Whatever Happened to Suderov ? *gives us an intriguing glimpse of the tactics interplanetary politicians might employ. Lee Harding's* Dancing Gerontius *offers a science-fictional perspective on old age. Michael Wilding's* The Man of Slow Feeling *is about a man who suffers an accident which causes him not to feel sensations until three hours after the action which produced them—a sensitive portrayal of an unusual predicament.*

The thought left in my mind by these anthologies is that if Australian sf writers can do this, they can do anything. Australia may not yet have produced a Heinlein, a Ballard or an Aldiss, but one is well on the way. I look forward to future developments and, indeed, to more anthologies like these.

(These books can be obtained through the specialist booksellers or direct from the publishers: Angus & Robertson, 102 Glover Street, Cremorne Junction, New South Wales 2090, Australia.)

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